JOURNAL OF THE IRISH CHRISTIAN STUDY CENTRE

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REVIEWS

Vol. 2

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Books for review should be sent to Dr. John H. Gillespie, French Department, The University of Ulster, Coleraine, Northern Ireland, BT52 1SA.

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REVIEWS 74

"Fools for Christ, Foolmakers for Christ"—The recovery of persuasive Christian advocacy

(The Second C. S. Lewis Memorial Lecture, 20th January 1984)

by OS GUINNESS

My genuine pleasure and sense of privilege at being invited to give this second C. S. Lewis Memorial Lecture is tempered by one main thing: unlike your distinguished lecturer last year, I did not have the privilege of knowing C. S. Lewis personally. Having said that, I did come to faith through reading Lewis's *Mere Christianity* as a sixth former and I am certain that the topic we are tackling tonight is one which would be very close to his heart as an apologist. Besides, the breakthrough in my own understanding in this area actually came from a remark of his that I heard quoted, although I have never been able to trace its source. The remark had the effect of breaking a log jam in my thinking. The experience of being forced to laugh at oneself, he is said to have remarked, is the closest that human beings ever come, on a natural plane, to the experience of repentance.

Let me begin at two places a long way from C. S. Lewis or traditional apologetics. One of the most widely read Christian books today—thanks to the *Readers' Digest*—was *Peace Child*. Don and Carol Richardson from Australia went as missionaries to West Irianjiah where they discovered the Sawis, a tribe whose highest value was treachery. The Sawis even had a custom which they called "fattening for friendship" whereby they encouraged people to think that they really trusted them, invited them for dinner, killed them and ate them. Naturally, this created problems for the Richardsons when they attempted to share the Gospel, problems that were theoretical as well as practical. They discovered, for example, that when they told the story of the last week of Christ's life, the whole tribe got immensely enthusiastic and broke into applause—but for Judas, not Jesus. Jesus was the sucker, Judas the hero. How on earth were they to make sense of the Gospel in such a topsy-turvy situation?

We have probably all heard stories like that, but many people tend to think that such communication puzzles are limited to the world of the "mission field". Far from it. I suggest to you that many of our acquaintances in the modern world are just as difficult to reach as that. Secularism has made them tone deaf to the supernatural just as relativism has rendered them colour blind to issues of truth and to the vital differences between the various religious faiths. Our problem in the West is much the same as that facing the Richardsons among a Stone Age people. How do we make convincing sense of the Gospel to people apparently so closed?

My other starting point might appear a long way from anything Christian at all. As well as being a great American novelist, Norman Mailer is well known for his belligerent chauvinism and he is often opposed by feminists wherever he goes. In the 1970s when invited to speak at Florida State University, he was warned that a huge phalanx of feminists had come out to jeer him. Mailer therefore stepped forward to the microphone and said, "All right, you women", (or rather more colourful words to that effect!) "Boo now". Evidently the feminists obliged and for several minutes there was a sustained barrage of booing, hissing and jeering. Inevitably, however, it subsided after a time and when quiet fell he stepped back to the mike and said, "Didn't I tell you, you obedient little women?" From then onwards they listened in a subdued silence.

Mailer is hardly a pattern for Christian virtue, but I suggest to you that this style of communication was far closer to certain biblical styles than most of ours is. Take the example of Micaiah in 1 Kings 22. Jehosaphat and Ahab, you remember, were going out to battle and all the prophets to a man had said, "Attack and win". In good modern style the prophets had even used visual aids to make their point. Jehoshaphat was not satisfied and asked if there was no other prophet. "Yes", said Ahab, "There is one and he always prophesises evil about me". Micaiah is therefore negatively stereotyped, but they fetch him and the Chamberlain orders him to prophesy victory as all the others had.

What would you have done if you were in Micaiah's shoes? He has been stereotyped, he is under strict orders and he is hopelessly in a minority. If you read the text carefully you will see that he comes on and says exactly the same as the other prophets had. But he does so sufficiently tongue in cheek for Ahab (no less) to burst out, "I adjure you in the name of the Lord to tell us the truth". Micaiah obliges. He drops the foolery and says, "You'll lose and you'll die. I saw all Israel scattered like sheep on the hillside without a shepherd". Ahab, in others words, had walked onto Micaiah's left hook just as surely as the feminists did to Norman Mailer's.

Now if you study the varieties of creative communication in the Scriptures, from the humblest pun up through parables and drama to what is surely the greatest *double entendre* of all time—the Incarnation—they mostly pivot on the same things: a discrepancy between an expectation which is built up in one direction and an effect which is suddenly brought about in another. By effecting a switch or sudden shift in thinking, as with a lunchline, such communication succeeds by reversing the original meaning and revealing a new one. It becomes a form of subversion through surprise.

A Central Problem Today

Let us consider one of the chief practical problems we face in Christian communication today—the loss of creative persuasion. This problem could be unwrapped either theoretically, which I shall leave because of lack of space, or practically. The latter is what matters ultimately, of course, in

day-to-day Christian living.

Is it an overstatement to say that ninety-nine per cent of our Christian communication today is directed at less than one per cent of our contemporaries—those people who are open, interested or needy enough to be ready for what we say? If you examine Christian communication from the simplest tract to the most sophisticated apologetic tome, most examples depend on a substantial amount of interest, need or openness. Yet you do not have to think long to realise that most people in the British Isles are not open, not interested and not particularly aware of need at any particular moment. This means simply that the greater part of our apologetics, and much of our evangelism too, is directed at the tiny minority of people and has little or nothing to say to the majority.

A number of simple examples will make the point plain. In the new American electronic evangelism, for example, appeals for money are made repeatedly with the incentive of reaching 'X' number of unreached people for Christ. Doubtless most evangelists who make such appeals are totally sincere. But studies show that very few genuine outsiders are actually reached and comparatively few genuinely unchurched are actually won to Christ. Electronic evangelism, in short, commonly lacks the genuinely creative persuasion to appeal to and win people who are truly outside.

Another example comes from Australia, where Christians have had to wrestle with the uncomfortable fact, indicated by research, that there is a high correlation between the cultures in which people are born and the churches in which they are born again. For all the talk of the Gospel being "the power of God", comparatively few people are born again outside the broad circles in which they were born in the first place. In short, Christian witness only rarely breaks out of the sub-cultures or groupings in which people are already.

Coming closer to home geographically and methodologically, I remember an evening at the Swiss L'Abri listening to a Christian student from Cambridge witnessing to an existentialist from Paris. The argument between them raged backwards and forwards for several hours, mainly centering on the Resurrection. Clearly the Frenchman was highly intrigued just as the Cambridge student was well informed. The latter had obviously read *Who moved the stone?* and he argued cogently for the facts of the resurrection. Toward midnight the Frenchman finally said, "Yes, I believe that Jesus Christ did rise from the dead". Instantly the Cambridge student sat back in his seat with a look of jubilation as if he had been a Russian Grand Master who had just said "Checkmate". The Frenchman, however, looked at him in astonishment and said, "But so what?" Within the framework of his existentialist universe there could be six resurrections a day before breakfast, but none would lead to the conclusion that Jesus Christ was Lord and God.

Such examples could be multiplied, but the point is surely clear. Evangelism and apologetics are both comparatively straightforward when people are sufficiently open, interested or needy, yet most of our generation

for most of the time are not. Needless to say, such a comment implies no dismissal of the apologetics and evangelism that meets those people who are open, interested or needy. But we must surely ask how we are to reach the majority, especially when we remember that in the last eighty years the number of secular people has grown from 0.2 per cent of the world's population to 21.3 per cent. It has grown, in other words, from one-fifth of one per cent to one-fifth of the entire world.

What this means is that the number of people who are either "colour blind" or "tone deaf" is increasing all the time and such people, of course, are not statistics. They are members of our own families, our own colleagues, our own neighbours and friends and so on. If the effectiveness of evangelism and apologetics were judged in the light of considerations like these, it would be seen that the lack of creative persuasion is a central problem in Christian communication today.

A Precedent from Christian History

Christian history provides a rich treasury of precedents and patterns to help us in our present dilemma. But out of the extraordinary range of people and styles from which we may learn, there is one which I would suggest is the most illuminating and helpful for our time: Erasmus' sixteenth century understanding of the biblical notion of fools and fool-making. No other notion today, I would argue, is at once more biblical, practical and timely.

To understand this notion in its setting, we need to appreciate, in the first place, the double challenge faced by Christians at the time of the Renaissance. On one hand, the Renaissance world was extremely relativistic. The North was clashing with the South, tradition with the new ideas, and soon Protestants were to be clashing with the Catholics. Thus many of the traditionally accepted features of the medieval world were in disarray, while fixed authorities were topsy-turvy. As Shakespeare put it in *King Lear*, "Truth and goodness to the vile seemed vile". It was a world that was as upside-down and inside-out, chaotic and relativistic as the world of the Sawis was in relation to the values of the Gospel. In such a time how were the Christians to make convincing sense of the Gospel?

Only a generation or two earlier, figures such as the pilgrim, the knight and the monk could speak simply and straightforwardly and count on being understood. But such was the relativism in the Renaissance, such was the disarray of the old verities and authorities, that this was no longer possible. How then were Christians to speak faithfully and yet freshly and forcefully at once?

On the other hand, the Renaissance Church was deeply and notoriously worldly. Thomas Linacre, for example, was Henry VIII's physician at the time of the Reformation and he was handed a copy of the Gospels towards the end of his life when he joined the church. Having read them for the first time, he made the famous remark, "Either these are not the Gospels or we are not Christians". Such a remark vividly reveals the age's striking disparity

between the standards of the Gospel and the practice of Christians. Again, it raised the problem that, if the church was so worldly, how could Christians make sense of the Gospel in a way which would be clear enough to convince those outside who saw the Church? The obvious parallels with the relativism of the twentieth century and the worldliness of the contemporary Church needs no underscoring.

In addition, to appreciate the notion of fool-making in its setting we need to understand the double context from which it sprang. On the one hand the notion grows out of a Christian understanding of the social context in which humans live. When Genesis 2 describes Adam's ability to name the animals, it demonstrates that the capacity to identify is part of our God-given gift as human beings. If there had been no Fall, human beings would have named and identified correctly, appropriately and justly. After the Fall, however, the capacity is double-edged. We can identify and we can name, but we can also label and stereotype. Naming is now relative and it depends on who says so and why.

This theological interpretation lies behind the purely sociological observation that all human societies have three main types of social categories. The first, that of heroes, is positive, while the other two, villains and fools, are negative. Of course, every culture, every society, every nation has a different cast of heroes, villains and fools and it is important to ask: who says so? And by what authority? But from a Christian perspective, while many categories of "foolishness" are grounded only in differences of culture and grouping, the deepest reason for the relativity of folly is not society, but sin. On the other hand, the notion of foolmaking can only be understood against the historical context in which the Renaissance Christians found themselves. Not that the history of folly made it an obvious choice for Christians. On the contrary, it was a surprising, even shocking, choice as a glance at the three main strands of the tradition of folly reveals.

First, there was the tradition of the "common fool". Our English word "fool" comes from the Latin word for "bellows" and was used to refer to a person whose head was considered as empty as a pair of bellows. There were, needless to say, no mental hospitals or asylums in Europe at that time, so "fools" were free-roaming, commonly understood and accepted in society. Since "fools" had not been educated and could not be expected to appreciate the niceties of etiquette, social status and ranking, they were given social license to offend. After all, they were "only fools".

Second, there was the tradition of the "clever fool", the person who saw that the common fool was on to a good thing. The clever fools realised, in other words, that by playing the fool they could offend against etiquette, social status and ranking, and if the heat came down on them they could excuse themselves by saying, "After all, I am only a fool". There was in fact an explosion of fooling in the late medieval period from the domestic and village levels right up to the levels of the papacy and the royal courts.

Third, there was the tradition which made it especially hard for Christians to consider the notion in a positive light, the tradition of the

"controversial fool". Both in its pre-Christian origins and in its medieval outworkings the notion of folly had deeply pagan overtones. It had long been associated with primitive ideas about divine possession and sacrificial scapegoating, and, in the form of the Feast of Fools, medieval folly took over from the Roman Feast of Kalends and gave annual license to bawdiness and blasphemy. Only with great difficulty had the Church stamped this out so, not surprisingly, the image of jesters, jugglers and fools was rather suspect to most Christians by the time of the Renaissance.

With such an unlikely background the Christian appropriation of the notion of folly was all the more extraordinary, but what writers like Erasmus did was take the pagan notion of folly and turn it on its head, and in so doing go back to an understanding of folly which was at once profoundly biblical and deeply effective.

Finally, to appreciate Erasmus' notion of foolmaking we need to see the Christian categories of folly in which it makes sense. From a biblical perspective there are three main types of fool, theologically speaking. The first type is what we might call the "fool proper". This is the person who before God actually *is* a fool. Proverbs and Psalms are littered with examples of such fools. Psalm 14, for example, speaks of the fool who says in his heart that there is no God. Thus folly in a fallen world may be relative, and everything depends on who says so. But there are some people who are fools because God says so. This is the category of the "fool proper" and an example of a medieval use of this category—which is no direct help to us in our problem—is Sebastian Brant's *Ship of Fools*.

The second type of fool is one which we might call the "fool-bearer". This is the person who is not actually a fool in himself before God, but is viewed and treated as one by the world because of his faithfulness to God. Thus the world, in self-styled wisdom which is actually folly, misunderstands true wisdom and treats it as folly, although it is actually wise. The fool-bearer is thus the fool for Christ. Plainly, as this last phrase shows, the words themselves go back to 1 Corinthians 4:10. "You are such sensible Christians", Paul says, "but we are fools for Christ". The idea, however, is far older and can be found throughout the Bible. David, for instance, danced with joy before the Lord that his own wife considered him a fool, while Jeremiah was treated as a laughing stock and Job became the butt of comedy to his own former friends. But supremely in Scripture, Jesus himself is God's own fool as the Praetorian Guard makes him a mock king, putting a reed sceptre in his hands and pressing a crown of thorns on his head.

This notion of the Christian as fool-bearer flowed down into Christian history and has been a powerful motif in discipleship and sanctification. Among those who have made significant use of it are John Chrysostom, Peter Damian and Francis of Assisi (who called his followers *"moriones mundi"*). It is a deeply important spiritual theme, but it does not go far enough by itself to aid us in our problem.

The third type of fool—the foolmaker—is the one which helps us

directly. The foolmaker is the person who plays the fool or is prepared to be taken as a fool, but only so as to turn the tables on those who consider themselves wise, high and mighty and so on. If 1 Corinthians 4:10 is a biblical example of Paul as a fool-maker, then 1 Corinthians 1 is Paul's powerful example of God as divine foolmaker. To subvert the world's wisdom, power and sense of status, the divine foolmaker uses what the world counts as folly, weakness and nonentities and thus turns the tables on its futile pretensions.

The supreme sixteenth century example of Christian foolmaking was Erasmus' *The Praise of Folly* and the difference between that work and Brandt's *Ship of Fools* is obvious. By the time Mother Folly has finished her capers, two things are clear: on the one hand, that everyone is a fool *except the fool;* and on the other hand that the fool, Mother Folly, is actually the wisdom of Christ in disguise. My concern with Erasmus is not with the substance of his arguments—my sympathies at that point are with Martin Luther—but with his style. Three things come together in *The Praise of Folly* in a simple but effective way.

First, it was the right age for such a style. In a simpler and more straightforward age it would have been redundant. But when the world was so relativistic and the Church so worldly, things were so inside out and upside down that only a different style of communication could succeed, subverting by surprise. Second, the Christian faith was the right "sort of truth" for such a style. Not every type of faith or belief can communicate with the same creativity and flexibility. There are certain secular beliefs, for instance, which are so rooted in, and restricted to, the here and now that they have nothing by which to relativise and judge them. They have no heaven from which to relativise the earth. Equally, certain forms of mysticism have the opposite problem. That "real truth", always behind the apparent truth, is never discoverable. But as the veils are stripped away one suspects that the truth behind the truth is no truth at all. Thus, instead of being funny, the infinite regress becomes an echoing laughter which threatens to make one mad. With the Christian faith, by contrast, God's truth relativises human understanding just as heaven always judges the earth and the infinite always calls into question the finite. But mercifully one is not left with a receding echo. The buck stops with God's truth. Third, Erasmus and those who followed him in using this style had the right type of minds. They were flexible, creative, skilful in using irony and well able to handle this sort of communication brilliantly. This was not true of all Christians then, as witnessed by Martin Dorp's earnest but misguided review of *The Praise of Folly* , and our lack in this area today is a key source of weakness in Christian communication, especially in Britain.

The Possibility of Recovery Today

What is the possibility of rediscovering such an approach today? For that to be possible, let alone desirable, our whole understanding of what is

involved will have to be developed according to biblical truths rather than purely pragmatic techniques. Needless to say, supplying a comprehensive theology to support this approach would be impossible here, but let me just make two simple points. First, have you noticed the degree of flexibility in biblical communication? If you study the different styles of communication in the Bible, it is apparent that there is a continuum of approaches possible. They are stretched out between the two poles of approaches suitable for those who are almost totally open to faith and those are almost totally closed. My own suggested candidate for the choice of the most open person in Scripture would be the Philippian gaoler. You will notice that the Apostle Paul's response to his question is simpler and more straightforward than the simplest evangelistic approach today. That is typical of the biblical response when people are open. One should not take a second longer or be a word more circuitous and complicated than necessary. On the other hand, as people show themsleves less open, intellectually, morally or spiritually, so you notice that God speaks in ways that are appropriate to the amount of their closure and blindness. In Numbers 12, for example, the Lord says that he talks to the ordinary people through the prophets, to prophets through visions, but face to face only to Moses. Or in Isaiah 28 God reminds the prophet that Isaiah is not talking baby language to innocents, but that if the people persist in their rebellion God will speak to them in like manner—through brutal foreign armies.

Second, have you noticed an intriguing blindspot in evangelical applications of biblical principles of communication? It would be a commonplace in conservative circles—and rightly so—to insist that repentance is a prerequisite for conversion. Very few people would argue against that. But how many conservatives also notice the truth that accompanies it in Scripture: namely, that any communication which has the turn-around of repentance as its goal will need to carry the same turn-around in its own styles and structures.

The best way to illustrate this point is to outline some of the biblical examples of creative persuasion. In each of these the very method itself, and not merely its goal, has within it the same subversive dynamic as the goal which is their aim. Obviously these approaches are specially appropriate to people who are closed, just as they would be wrong for use with people who are open. Notice too that, to some degree or other, each of these approaches succeeds because it is not direct, detached and prosaically dull but indirect, involving and imaginative. One example is the use of questions in Scripture, such as God's response to Adam and Eve after the Fall, to Job when his doubt leads him to blasphemy or, supremely, to the critical and obtuse by Jesus himself. Samuel Johnson once remarked that questioning is not a mode of conversation among gentlemen. God, in that case, is not a gentleman, for it is clear that God was a gadfly long before Socrates. Where unbelief is likely to trudge around in a routine circle of its own presuppositions, a statement would be deflected without a thought but a question forces a new entry point into the circle of presuppositions.

It therefore increases the likelihood of a new point of exit from the old circle of presuppositions. Other examples are the biblical use of parables (such as Nathan's to David), object lessons (such as Jeremiah's use of the non-drinking Rechabites) and so on. In each case an essential biblical feature emerges strongly, and one that is very different from contemporary Western practices—the story (or parable or whatever) does not so much illustrate the truth, it *is* the truth.

I am not suggesting that this style of persuasive communication is uniquely Christian. It is deeply human and despite modern rationalism, current examples can be found. Bertolt Brecht, for example, employed what he used to call "defamiliarising" or "alienating" techniques with the same goal in mind. But considering the brilliant precedents in Christian history as well as the profundity of the underlying theological rationale, it is clear that no one has more of a right to this than Christians. Sadly, however, this type of communication is all too rare today, although a small but important tradition in apologetics has kept it alive in our own country. Perhaps the leading figure in this was G. K. Chesterton, who faced a task similar to that of Erasmus. The average Englishman, Chesterton said, did not know the Gospel because he knew it too well. It would have been easier to speak to a Chinaman than an Englishman because the Chinaman saw things freshly and therefore fairly. Chesterton therefore became a master of the use of wit, incongruity and surprise. Through G. K. Chesterton, of course, the approach passed down to Tolkien, who introduced it to C. S. Lewis.

Are there not Problems in this Approach?

I am deeply aware that what I have argued is merely suggestive, rather than systematic. I am also aware that there is a whole cluster of questions and objections that need to be answered if this approach is to be pursued further. Perhaps the most common objection is that this approach requires a level of education and sophistication far beyond the average person. Quite the opposite, I suggest, is the case. If most of us find ourselves incapable or out of practice with this approach, it is because we have been incapacitated by Western philosophy and education. I admit that all I have shared with you is virtually the confession of a repentant, prosaic literalist, since much of my own education has systematically squeezed out familiarity with this creative, ironic, subversive approach. The discipline of apologetics is so close to that of philosophy that it is particularly affected by this problem, but the creative approach flourishes unnoticed in fields such as poetry and drama—in fields, in other words, where the creative approach is used naturally and instinctively. An obvious example is the subversive quality in many of Steve Turner's poems.

A different kind of objection is that this approach needs a rigorous philosophical description if it is not to sound merely poetic, if not fanciful.

That is certainly an important challenge, although an adequate response to it would require an essay in itself. To put the matter briefly, however, the overall task of creative persuasion is to communicate so that a person is transferred from one circle of faith (or horizon of meaning) to another. To effect this successfully, the communication itself—whether a parable or play or whatever—moves through at least three stages. First, there is a *tension assumed* (David, for instance, is a murderer, but has drowned out consciousness of it when Nathan talks to him). Second, there is a *fusion achieved* (through his parable Nathan creates a shared world with David who becomes highly involved.) Third, there is a *subversion effected* (Nathan's punchline, "You are the man!" leads to David's conviction.) This is a mere hint of a possible hermeneutical description that could be made, but it indicates that the approach is not merely fanciful. It can be given a rigorous philosophical description.

One final objection is that this approach seems to smack of the danger of manipulation. But I suggest to you again that, when you examine it more closely, the reverse is the case. Much contemporary evangelism and apologetics are unquestionably manipulative, but there is a simple reason why this approach is not: no one comes to any conclusion that they do not reach themselves. Since the approach is indirect, involving and imaginative, the conclusion is never spelt out by the communicator—it is drawn by the recipients themselves.

Having said that, there is an objection to this approach which is inescapable. It has a sting in the tail which must be borne. The temptation is to view the approach as a technique or method but, biblically speaking, it is only secondarily a technique. Primarily it is a manner or a means of participating in the life of Christ himself. To put it differently, this type of creative subversion is at the very heart of the Incarnation. When man sinned and went away from God, God became man to bring man back. When men in their folly thought their wisdom so wise that they missed the wisdom of God and thought it folly, God allowed his wisdom to be seen as folly to subvert that wisdom. He was rich yet for our sakes became poor so that we, through his poverty, might become rich. He was without sin yet became sin for us that we might be saved from sin.

At point after point it is clear that this type of dynamic subversion is at the very heart of the Incarnation itself. The question therefore is not, "Is this a technique that we can use?" but, "Is this a truth in which we are prepared to participate sacrificially as the pattern of the Incarnation indicates?" Nothing less than that is the task of the apologist.

There were two symbols for apologetics in the Middle Ages. The first was the closed fist, which represented the force of close-knit relationship, particularly useful in destroying other people's arguments. The second symbol was the open hand, which represented the wisdom of Christ in terms of spiritual eloquence, creative, imaginative and appealing. Apologists at that time believed passionately and equally in both symbols, and both are

well represented in the Scriptures. Contemporary apologetics, however, are absurdly overbalanced in the direction of the closed fist. Yet if our contemporaries are as tone deaf and colour blind as it appears, what we need today, and should work and pray for, I suggest, is revival of the open hand.

Shadows on Glass: Reading Television

by JOHN GILLESPIE

Few would disagree with Malcolm Muggeridge's opinion that 'the media in general and TV in particular, and BBC television especially, are incomparably the greatest single influence in our society today, exerted at all social, economic and cultural levels.'[1] From Einstein to Hammerstein, Cube roots to Cupitt, Karl Marx to Groucho Marx, Shakespeare to Shakin' Stevens, all human life seems to be there. Television, indeed, is all-pervasive. How could it be otherwise when we watch it, on average, 3 hours 10 minutes a day, in other words almost one full day a week? Television watching, which claims more of our time than eating, food preparation or sport, is our most popular leisure activity. More than 95% of our homes have at least one TV set and more than one in five have a video-cassette recorder. We programme our lives, or our VCRs, to suit its schedules, we revere its stars and we let its advertisements tell us what to do and what to buy. Moreover, as the electronic revolution progresses, it is likely that TV will become even more prominent than it is at present. The growing interest in teletext and the development of interactive services will encourage us to use our sets in conjunction with computer terminals and data bases to provide ourselves with all kinds of useful services until we finally become the truly 'wired society'. Cable television, when it eventually arrives, will give us a far wider range of choice of viewing (in the USA there are as many as 50 channels available in some places) than at present, even though quality is likely to be sacrificed for the sake of quantity. Direct broadcasting by satellite will enable us, among other things, to see programmes from other countries and encourage us to improve our knowledge of foreign languages.

Clearly there are many positive aspects to the widespread use of television. Raw information can be sent more simply and easily. The housebound are able to keep in touch with the outside world more readily. We can take advantage of the enhanced opportunities for education, not just by watching Open University programmes, but also the various documentaries and series that are screened. We can learn about disasters in the Third World, such as the present terrible famine in North-East Africa and be encouraged to do what we can to help. We can watch Alex Higgins play snooker, keep up to date with the state of play in the Test Match or follow the dramatisation of classical works of literature such as *Barchester Towers, Pickwick Papers* or *Anna of the Five Towns*. Well entertained and well informed, we can easily feel ourselves to be living in a global village—only a remote control button away from New Delhi, New Caledonia, Newfoundland or Newtownards.

The Problem with Television

However, many Christians who recognise the centrality of TV in their lives are uneasy. They are embarrassed by their dependence on it and the problems it seems to cause. They worry and protest about the content of programmes—bad language, overt sexuality, the glorification of violence—they are concerned about what they should and should not view (and whether they should view it on a Sunday). They are anxious about the influence of TV on their children. They regret the fact that TV kills conversation and lessens the quality of family life. They deplore the inadequacy of most religious broadcasting, with its sceptical documentaries and its play-it-safe hymn-singing programmes. They are uneasy about consumer values projected by slickly produced advertisements, and they feel guilty at spending a lot more time in front of their screens than they do in worship, prayer, Bible study or helping their neighbours. But most of the time their concern merely focusses on the content of certain programmes and the social effects of watching TV in general. As a result they fail to see that its influence on us is more fundamental than they realise.

Television and Secularisation

Television's influence on us is fundamental and threatening because of its power to bend our minds without our being aware of it. It is no exaggeration to say that television sets the agenda for what our society is thinking. That is partly because it is a mass medium. Everyone knows its concerns and, as a result, many people seem to be thinking about the same things—the outcome of the Miners' strike, the famine in Ethiopia, the women of Greenham Common or whatever. But TV does not just set the agenda for society, it is also able, because of its privileged position, to form a consensus or orthodoxy of values and beliefs. And so, since our society is a secular one, it has become the main transmitter of secular values, part of the secularisation process that has made our society, both in its understanding of the world and in its day-to-day activity, a post-Christian one—one which does not mix God or religion with the important business of living. The world of television is the world of space and time, of the here and now. Christianity is not seen to be true. For instance events are not considered to be unfolding as parts of God's plan and the idea that sin might actually be the cause of many of our moral and political ills is given no credence whatsoever. It is not that these values are always transmitted in obvious ways, as in series such as *The Ascent of Man*, *Life on Earth* or *The Sea of Faith*. In fact television has been shown to be ineffective as an opinion-former if it makes a direct assault on moral, political or religious beliefs. Rather it transmits a hidden curriculum of secular humanist values. Within that secular consensus, although it often appears to be neutral, objective and fair, its programmes constantly convey various moral, social and political messages—and we rarely notice.

Television itself, as an invention, emphasises human achievement and ingenuity and is, therefore, a powerful symbol of the process of modernisation, of a world which does not need God as an hypothesis, and where each succeeding scientific discovery or technological innovation further reinforces the illusion that man is increasingly in control of his destiny. In such a secularised context, the plausibility of Christian belief in the supernatural is undermined, if not destroyed. Indeed, as far as religious belief is concerned, British television is thoroughly pluralistic; for political and other reasons, it allows diverse groups to put forward their beliefs in their own way. Such pluralism is double-edged. Its evenhandedness suggests neutrality and yet that very neutrality automatically undermines any credibility religion might attain, and forms part of the monolithic secularist orthodoxy which prevails in our society. Os Guinness's comments on secularisation are particularly apt: 'the slow subtle but all-powerful shaping of culture has all the advantages of a complete philosophical revolution with none of the disadvantages of intellectual sweat.'[2]

Television then, despite its façade of evenhandedness, is an agency of social conformity. Not only is this true of the lifestyle of the consumer society advocated by the commercial breaks and the not-so-subtle messages of the soap operas, and of the portrayal of 'normality' and official reality through news programmes (for example during the Falklands war), but also in the area of beliefs and values. Most Christians seem to be insufficiently aware of this, straining at the gnats of swearwords and bare bosoms, and swallowing the camels of secularism. The worldliness we fret about is merely the symptom of the worldliness of secularism which is so skilfully conveyed by the medium of TV and against which we need to be on our guard.

Television in Action

As we consider how television affects us as viewers it will become clear that keeping up our guard is not easy. There are a number of reasons for this.

First, television is a medium which depends on intimacy. We watch it in our own homes, when we are at our most relaxed and our least critical.

Second, it puts a premium on immediacy. We are given the immediate experience of many things which are not normally within our grasp. The excitement of the visual images to which we are constantly exposed has an entrancing effect and keeps us watching this constantly changing world. Because of television's attraction, we are easily distracted from family, from friends and from spiritual concerns. A turn of the switch or the press of a button and our appetitie for excitement and variety of experience can be satisfied.

Third, our experience, although enriched, is experience at a distance. Our appreciation of a bomb explosion, for example, seen on television, does not compare with what we would expereince were we close to such an event ourselves. Our knowledge is depersonalised and our feelings, to an extent, dehumanised.

Fourth, television encourages us to be passive, to let the programmes wash over us, to be passively excited by the new opiate of the people.

Fifth, by spreading excitement through its striking images and by encouraging intimacy and passivity, television is biased in its essence against understanding. It does not require us to think in a logical, disciplined, linear manner. Instead, it relies on a kind of visual logic. It is partly for that reason and partly because of its ephemeral nature, that it affects our emotions more than our minds. It is well known, from various research studies, that we do not retain detailed information from news bulletins, just a few general, mainly visual impressions.

Sixth, television is a medium that inevitably encourages us to live in a fantasy world, an intimate exciting world of heightened emotion and vicarious experience. As in Pascal's concept of *divertissement*, television becomes a method of keeping our minds busy and thus diverted from thinking about the big questions of life.

Lastly, because of its strongly visual character and its programming techniques, television encourages us to think that seeing is believing. Just because we have seen something on the screen we are encouraged to think that it is true and real. The very opposite, in fact, is closer to the truth.

Now some may object that they are not so easily fooled by television as I am suggesting. They will maintain that they are aware of the ways in which television operates and will prove it by pointing out how people make fun of *Dallas*, *Crossroads* or *Family Fortunes*. They will make the observation that the striking members of the NUM are far from convinced that the presentation of television news is objective and fair. But whether this scepticism about television is due to a middle-class sense of superiority or to a partisan working-class distrust of politicians and the establishment, it appears to be strictly selective. It does not indicate, for example, an awareness of the way television structures its message or manufactures its myths. Even when such scepticism is rife, therefore, the messages of secularism still go out and the essentially pagan world-view of our society still reigns supreme. Superficial criticism of this kind is no proof against the mystification of the messages of television.

Television and Reality

1. The Role of the Producer

It is because television encourages us to think that seeing is believing that we pick up all sorts of messages without being aware of it. We usually forget that there is a producer, that news programmes, documentaries, plays, even live programmes have to be edited. In other words we forget that what we see and hear is not reality as it truly is, but reality as it is refracted through the eyes of the producer. We forget that there is a cutting room and that what is kept or cut is kept or cut for certain reasons. Malcolm Muggeridge goes so far as to say that 'Not only *can* the camera lie, it always lies'[3] and stresses the faking possibilities of the cutting room, particularly

for news, which he calls the 'Unholy Grail, the ultimate fantasy on which the whole structure of the media is founded.'[4]

But even if we do not go so far as to accuse television of being totally bogus, it is clear that, in documentaries for instance, the role of the producer is crucial. It makes a difference how a programme is structured—whether the report assumes a neutral position presenting both sides of a controversy or whether it chooses to support one particular point of view. It makes a difference whether we see the reporter or not, for he lends authenticity to the report, especially if he is well known. It also makes a difference who is interviewed during a dispute. Are all points of view represented? Are the questions hostile, information-seeking or sympathetic? How are the interviews woven into the documentary? And if there are no interviews, why is that the case? All these devices and more are at a producer's disposal if he wants to convey a certain impression. It is relatively easy for him in reporting a political dispute to present the material in the interests of one side or the other.

2. The Role of Visual Signs

Once again some will maintain that they are aware of the ways in which producers select and organise their material and therefore influence the direction of a report or documentary. However, even if we concede that this is true for a substantial minority of viewers, which I doubt, it is unlikely that they can maintain that they are aware of the extent to which the producer's power rests not only in his capacity to arrange the material of his programmes, but also in his capacity to control what we actually see.

Seeing is not believing. We fall into the trap of thinking that it is, because television helps us to see what we want to see or expect to see. The visual signs of television, which are arranged, like the other elements at his disposal, by the producer, form a social language which we need to learn to read. Clearly, it is not a language alien to the concerns or values of society. On the contrary, it is an especially strong concentration of them in visual form. One is tempted to say that every picture or image tells a story, but, in fact, that is not quite true. If we see a shot of an unfamiliar building, or a photograph of a missing person on the screen, we know that we are dealing with a realistic visual sign, a sign which is what it appears to be. It may be given a further meaning by its position in a programme or by the remarks of a commentator, but that is another matter. However, many of the visual signs we see are already determined by cultural or conventional meanings. For example a sequence showing a car being driven at high speed may be merely descriptive, but if that car is the General Lee, it will connote values of freedom, virility, youthful rebellion against authority and the delights of living in dear old Dixie. Similarly the sight of serried ranks of guardsmen marching down Horse Guards' Parade during the Trooping of the Colour will signify loyalty to the crown, military discipline, the importance of tradition and ceremonial, and a certain sense of nationhood.

Recent structuralist theories, formulated by Roland Barthes among others, have used the term 'myth' to describe the shared cultural meanings on which television draws so constantly. A myth is a cultural convention which helps us to understand what we see in terms of the values of our society. It is a means of bringing what we see under the control of appropriate cultural values, and, in our society, that means ultimately secular values. Myths are not, therefore, untrue, but are a means of understanding the world. Television makes use of these visual myths and their presuppositions and also helps them to change and develop through use, as they constantly do. There is a dialectical interaction between the producer's use of visual signs as myths for his own purposes and the availability of myths to use. He is unable to depart entirely from the myths of society, for myths only make sense because of our collective cultural consciousness. Individual myths can, of course, be grouped together into sets of myths, or mythologies, for example in *Dallas*, which portrays the mythology of success, South Fork style. These mythologies are informed by common principles about the nature of reality and are ideological in character. There is, for example, in Bob Goudzwaard's terms, an 'Ideology of material prosperity'[5]—an ideology which is portrayed on our screens day in and day out in a whole series of interconnecting myths produced by our consumer society. Such objects can even become idols which we worship because of what they do for us, idols which receive our constant devotion.

It is these myths, mythologies and ideologies which remain when the detailed information conveyed by television is forgotten. It is because their effect is strongly visual, with the important addition of sound effects, that we are usually unaware of the extent to which these hidden persuaders reach us with their messages. And it is the total effect, rather than individual myths or programmes, that is important. Unless we become more aware of the way in which these processes operate, we are likely to become more and more influenced by the values of secular humanism.

Reading Television

As Christians, we need to learn how to read the audio-visual language of television so as to become aware of the ways in which its material is structured and to subject it to critical scrutiny. In other words we need to begin the process of demythologising television, to begin considering all kinds of programmes to see whether they are gradually conforming us to the secular humanist consensus through the subconsciously persuasive force of their myths. We must learn to look at television *with* our eyes, rather than merely *through* them. That is, after all, the biblical message regarding our involvement with society. We are told to 'take every thought captive to obey Christ' (2 co. 10.5 RSV); we are not to be conformed to this world but to be transformed by the renewal of our minds (Rom. 12.2). Indeed it is only if we begin to use our minds as Christians should, that we will be

able to avoid the dangers which watching television presents. That will obviously mean devoting a considerable amount of mental energy to watching it carefully, but it is essential that we do so. It will also mean learning to switch it off more readily than we do.

Some may object that looking for myths and mythologies is far too abstract and intellectual a task and not something that could be expected of everyone. Yet the same people would see nothing wrong with suggesing that we choose what we read carefully and that we read it critically. In any event I am not suggesting that we all become television critics, just that we all become critical of television. The problem is that it will be some time before many of us will be able to read the structures and audio-visual signs of the language of television quickly and easily so that we will be aware of all the message it is conveying. However it is a perfectly feasible undertaking. And it would be excellent if more Christians would consider taking their reading of television a little further and writing a few reviews or analyses of programmes or series for both Christians and unbelievers alike. A detailed analysis, for example of the myths of *Dallas*, *Coronation Street*, *Panorama* and *The Price is Right* would be very valuable. It is only by increasing our teleliteracy that we will be able to ensure that we are obeying Paul's command:

'Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things'. (Phil. 4.8, RSV).

NOTES

1. Malcolm Muggeridge, *Christ and the Media*, (London, 1977), p. 23
2. Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File* (London, 1983), p. 40.
3. Muggeridge, p. 30.
4. Muggeridge, p. 33.
5. Bob Goudzwaard, *Idols of our Time*, (Downers Grove, 1984), passim.

The Vocation of the Christian Historian

(A paper presented at the Irish Christian Study Centre's conference on 'History, Science and Faith', 18th February 1984)

by RONALD WELLS

This paper is written with the assumption that those who hear it are themselves committed Christians. While non-Christians are surely welcome to listen, and they may even profit from what is said, the main concerns of the paper may not be relevant to them. This is so because commitment prior to discussion is something I would not try to impose on someone. Nevertheless we proceed on the basis that Christianity as personal faith and as world-view are correct, and that what we seek is the integration of that faith commitment with historical study. By "historical study" I mean no special definition, unique to Christians, but historical study, commonly defined by those with research degrees who actually "do" history. Christians are called to write about and teach the same discipline as persons of any faith or of none. Christians, least of all, should try to redefine history, because we who believe in the coherence of multi-dimensional truth want to have the broadest possible discussion of all reality with all persons interested in serious inquiry.

If, in order to have an acceptable dialogue with all historians we must discuss the same reality, we define that as: all past human activity. At a stroke, therefore, a bone of contention arises. Christians are persons who follow God, or, as I prefer it from the Heidelberg Catechism, who belong to God. Much "Christian history," i.e., the Bible, is a testimony to the acts of God. But, as historians we study past human activity. Here is the contentious point: we historians study man, not God. Historians with research degrees agree on this. I know of no working historian whose subject is God in History—I do not mean the idea of God in the idea of history, but God as known by Hebrews and Christians and history by everyone who does history. People who write meta-history or providential history are either non-professional such as philosophers, theologians or clergy (e.g Jacques Ellul, Hendrikus Berkhof, James Montgomery Boice) or popularizers, most notably Francis Schaeffer. Occasionally a historian tries to write a providential history, and Christian scholars find it unpersuasive. I am thinking, for example, of John Warwick Montgomery's *Where Is History Going?*, and the public fight over it in the pages of *Fides et Historia* a decade ago.[1]

As Stanford Reid has suggested, we study man rather than God because of the radical hiatus between time and eternity. God, who is in eternity,

is inexplicable in human terms. We simply cannot reason from our time-space to God's eternality. We, who can only partially comprehend what we call time, can scarcely comprehend Him who is clearly beyond our reach. Even Moses, who was in a more direct contact with God than any person in modern times states flatly that "the hidden things belong to God."[2] Indeed, even in the Judaeo-Christian understanding of things, God is increasingly hidden as time passes. Even Christopher Dawson, who believes that the Incarnation of Christ is the key event of history, one which gives spiritual unity to the whole historical process, states that those events "have occurred as it were under the surface of history unnoticed by the historians."[3] In sum, for historians to try to discern God's actions in modern history seems a sterile task because of the inherently ineffable nature of the subject.

At this point, caution must be sounded and a balance struck. Just because we can know little of God's intended purposes it does not mean we know nothing at all. The twin difficulties of overassurance and overdiffidence has been discussed by E. Harris Harbison and summarized by Frank Roberts. "The tendency towards overassurance has generally been marked both by its disposition to play down the complexity and ambiguity of history and by its inclination to emphasize the clarity of the divine plan and purpose in events of the past." On the other hand, overdiffidence inclines historians to reject a distinctively Christian approach to history as either impossible or undesirable. Such writers as Karl Lowith and Van Harvey lean perhaps too far in this direction, either believing that, in the New Testament age, the confrontation with the powers is beyond the scope of knowing, or that the historical method itself is incompatible with belief.[4]

While one accepts the point that balance is important, and that a continuum between overassurance and overdiffidence exists, one nevertheless thinks that the sin of diffidence, if sin it indeed be, is not unnecessarily one of "sloth". Rather, one accepts the limitations noted above, not necessarily of a Christian approach to history, which this essay will affirm, but of knowing the work of God in history, and especially of "patterns" of providential action. Having mentioned the word pattern, we must make some mention of David Bebbington's excellent book, *Patterns in History: A Christian View*.[5] In it we have as sensitive and penetrating an analysis as to be found in the relationship of Christian commitment to historical study. Yet, even here we notice the tension between "technical" history (i.e., the history that all historians practice) and "providential" history (i.e., the history that only Christians can know). He does well to try to resolve that tension by a distinction between explicit and implicit renderings of faith commitments. Rather than a uniquely Christian history, Bebbington suggests that a believer can produce work which is "consistent" with the historian's Christian views: "What is written will be a distinctively Christian product, but the Christian content will be implicit rather than explicit."[6] I must say that I am not fully persuaded by Bebbington's

conclusion that the reasons for moving between technical and providential history is a tactical one, depending upon the audience to which the writing or the teaching is addressed—i.e., with academic colleagues one is implicit, with Christian sisters and brothers one is explicit. Yet, I appreciate Bebbington's work as the best statement yet on the vocation of the Christian historian.

At this point I would like to change the frame of reference, from history to the historian. I do so in the belief that the argument can be advanced if we can come to grips with who we are; and, with that in hand, we can return to what we can and should do. As Anthony C. Thiselton has suggested in a brilliant book on biblical hermeneutics, there are two horizons which must be reconciled, the objective and the subjective. There is always a dialectical relationship between the object of an historian's study and the subjective beliefs which she or he brings to the subect.[7] This is not an easy thing to do, as our academic preparation does not encourage that confrontation. In my own special interest, the European background to North American history, especially the migration of Europeans to North America, Oscar Handlin has well stated the problem I wish to discuss. In *The Uprooted* Handlin affirms that to understand the migrants he had to confront himself.[8] Our academic preparation does not encourage us to confront ourselves, and, to be sure, that confrontation can be discomfiting.

What does it mean for an historian to be conscious of himself before he can do historical study? Perhaps an illustration will help. On Easter 1977, the BBC televised a panel discussion on the subject of the resurrection. Bamber Gascoyne asked a question of his fellow discussants which is of ultimate importance for Christian historians: if there had been photographic technology on the Emmaus Road, and if a picture had been taken of Jesus and his two walking companions, would that picture have shown Jesus of Nazareth, whom everyone in Jerusalem knew? Or, did it require eyes of faith to see and recognize him in the breaking of bread? In short, if anyone could have recognized him there is no need for an act of faith to know the risen Christ. If, as Christian tradition has it, we see him as the Christ by an act of faith, then we have to lay aside for a moment the objective reality of a person on the Emmaus Road and inquire into the subjective matter of how we develop eyes of faith. At a stroke, the subject of conversation shifts from the thing observed to the observer. At this point in the conversation, historians become uncomfortable because instead of discussing "reality out there" or, "reality as it actually was" (Ranke), we are discussing ourselves—not the typical subject of discussion among us.

How do we develop eyes to see what we do see? More specifically, if we who are Christians wish to seek the application of our commitments in the actual doing of history, do we have eyes to see what others cannot, or will not, see? The main point here to which reference must be made is Carl Becker's famous essay "Every man His Own Historian" in which the most cogent case for subjectivism is made. In Becker's view, the historian becomes the main focus of history.[9] The past, he insists, is irretrievably lost, and if

it exists at all, it exists in the mind of the historian. A more modest case for relativism and subjectivism, one with which I feel quite comfortable, is that of E. H. Carr, for whom history is a dialogue between the past and the present.[10] "The past" is what happened, and that *is* lost, taken by itself. But, like Berkeley's notional unheard trees falling in the forest, the past event would be of little or no interest if we could not recall it or discuss it. "History" is *our* reconstruction of the past. As in any dialogue, both parties bring their respective contributions.

Historical study, then, is relativistic and subjective, to one degree or another. Part of reading E. P. Thompson on *The Making of the English Working Class* is to inquire into how Marx and Freud came into his pre-understanding (*Vorverstandnis*). Part of reading Erik Erikson on *Young Man Luther* is to inquire into how his pre-understanding of human development caused him to be less interested in Luther's theological ideas than in his bowels and bathroom habits. This came home very strongly to me in my first teaching job. We had a seminar required of all senior students. At one session they read Bainton on Luther, the next Erikson on Luther. The principal instructor in the seminar invited me to participate on the latter day. His intention was to portray Erikson as having "superceded" Bainton. I questioned this, and my colleague replied that Bainton merely gave a religious interpretation of Luther, and that now "everyone knows" that religion is an illusion, and that "reality" lies elsewhere. I asked how "everyone" knew that, to which my colleague suggested that since the publication of William James's *Varieties of Religious Experience* early in this century, no one could believe any longer in the normative and objective reality of religious experience. The students were unprepared for this discussion, because we were no longer talking about Luther, but about what my colleague and I knew about what everyone knew about reality. Another example on the point, but from a different angle of vision, will help us to see the point more clearly. Samuel Eliot Morison was criticized for one point in his biography of Christopher Columbus, in which he wrote that on the first sight of land in the new world, Columbus "staggered" to the deck.[11] The critic wanted to know how Morison knew that Columbus staggered. What were the sources? The ship's log records that on that day there were high seas and that the captain was ill. Very well, says the critic, but how do you know he "staggered"? Morison replied that he himself was an accomplished sailor and that he himself had sailed in a replica of the *Santa Maria*. In a high sea, when you are sick and in a ship like the *Santa Maria* you do not "walk" to the deck, you "stagger". In the end, Morison "knows" because his own experiences cause him to empathize with similar experiences in history. "Reality" then one supposes, is what most of my friends and I know it to be. To those who affirm that they "know that their redeemer lives", others will reply that they know that the class struggle exists. *Touchez*. Is the historical task, in sum, an academic version of what John Lennon wrote for the Beatles: "with a little help from my friends I get by"?

Is this where it rests then, a thorough-going subjectivism, energized by

self-authenticating experiences? Before we answer "no", as we qualifiedly will, let us state clearly that even if it were true, it would present no more difficulty for the Christian historian than for the marxist historian or psycho-historian. With Thompson and Erikson, celebrated practitioners of the historian's craft, allowed to see reality as they and their friends know it, why should we be embarrassed to see the past as we and our friends see it? What is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. While we as Christians do not necessarily endorse every disclosure of religious belief in history, (some may not have been genuine) we nevertheless are open to an interpretation which affirms that, *in reality*, religiously-motivated actions do exist. How do we know that Christ came into people's lives and transformed them? We know because we too have met the Christ, whether as catholics in the eucharist or as protestants by making a "decision for Christ". There are no such things as facts of history, and the past simply does not speak for itself because we understand only in the interpretive framework of the ideas we already hold. This insight appears to be shared across a broad ideological spectrum: Becker's relativism; Cornelius Van Til's apologetics; Thomas Kuhn's paradigmatic scientific analysis. Using Kuhn's language we see that fundamentally differing paradigms separate competing groups of theorists from each other, and communication across these paradigms is often virtually impossible.

Approaching this ineffable precipice of non-communication George M. Marsden rescues the argument by returning the question to the common sense understanding of everyday life. Here he draws upon the "common sense" school of thought, notably associated with Thomas Reid, the eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher. This helps us to account for the other side of the question, i.e., the experiences and understandings we have in common with non-Christians. There are, Reid argued, "first principles" which every human being affirms, and this affirmation is not contingent upon reason,commonly defined.

> *For instance, virtually everyone is forced to believe in the existence of the external world, in the continuity of one's self from one day to the next, in the connection between past and present, in the existence of other persons, in the connections between causes and effects . . . In practice, normal humans simple find it impossible not to rely on basic means of gaining access to knowledge. Only philosophers and crackpots, he was fond of saying, would seriously argue against the reliability of these first principles. And even skeptical philosophers duck when they go through low doorways. So do Hindu mystics.*[13]

This "common sense" approach (in its technical meaning) makes very good sense, in the ordinary sense of that term. At least since Hume, we are unsure that our ideas correspond to reality. Reid simply disposes of the philosophical concept of "ideas" and starts with common sense, which tells us that we can know directly something of reality. Knowledge, then, is not confined just to ideas, but involves what is really "out there". *We do have*

some theory-dependent access to events, some knowledge which cuts across all theories and paradigms. So, in actual fact, there is some common ground of inquiry into the human past. In theological terms, is this what we mean by "common grace"? Has God given a coherent universe, and given the good will of historians, can we not communicate fairly well the assurance that we are talking about the same things?

So where does this leave writing history from a perspective, Christian or otherwise? Again, George M. Marsden helps us with an analogy from gestalt psychology.[14] Surely every one, at one time or another, has seen the picture printed immediately below.

Young lady or old?

At first glance most people see the old lady, and only later do people see the young lady (indeed, I know several famous historians who said they could not see the young lady, despite some considerable effort to do so). In the common sense understanding of things, both ladies are there, but not everyone can see them. The presenter of such a picture will not get his viewers to see the second image through argumentation. Seeing, and believing, that the young lady is there, will come sometimes as insight, and it will change the viewer's understanding of what reality actually is. Christian seeing and believing is something like that. It is not that we see everything differently from non-Christians. All humans, as Reid pointed out, know the signs of everyday life. We come to know God and his work in a moment of shattering insight, flowing from things we have seen before many times. We know and experience grace in the eucharist, in nature, reading a scripture passage, etc., and when that understanding comes we say, "Oh, now I see", and a pattern emerges from what was there but unseen.

Historians should have little difficulty understanding this, because it is like the way we actually do history (minus, of course, the soul-shattering nature of the insights). A metaphor, again, will help to clarify: access to reality is limited by a series of lenses like the multiple-lens glasses that eye doctors test us with. While it is true that each person wears a different set of lenses, most normal people can read most of the letters on the chart. As Christians we have an extra set of lenses, which perhaps allows us to see what others see, but also more than they and perhaps more clearly. Indeed, as Nicholas Wolterstorff has argued, these extra lenses can act as "controls" on what we see through ordinary lenses, insuring that common sense beliefs will not contradict special beliefs.[15]

In conclusion, I hope it is now clear just what the balance is that this paper is trying to strike. We do history from a perspective, and the adequacy of an historical interpretation must take into account the historian who is in dialogue with the past. Nevertheless, all is not mere opinion and private experience because reality can be shown if we dispense entirely with Baconian-style empiricism and rely on common sense, which is, after all, analagous to how we really understand history or anything else. As Christians we say we see not the antithesis of what non-Christians see, but all that they see, and more, because we have that extra set of lenses. Further, that extra set of lenses helps us to see not only more, it helps to order and to control our understanding of what comes to us through the ordinary lenses.

C. T. McIntire has helped with an explanation of this, as clear as it is brilliant. Everyone knows that reality consists of time and space. Christians and non-Christians alike see this two-dimensionality. We Christians insist that there is a third dimension—spirit—and that a fully-orbed view of the world must be three-dimensional. Moreover, these dimensions are not arranged in a hierarchy of importance, rather they are integral to each other. Now, secular-minded people may well object to the claim of a spiritual dimension, but even they must see that good and evil exist in the world, and that it refers to something more ultimate (even if, for the moment, ultimacy is not God, but possibly even merely the mode of production). McIntire uses more comprehensive terms for time, space and spirit—historical, structural (ontic) and ultimate.[16]

Presented in this light, the integral and fully three dimensional world on which Christians insist, is something which we Christians see at first, but it is not so far from the experience of non-Christians that they cannot understand it. Perhaps like our dual gestalt picture, if it is pointed out that the nose of one is the chin of the other, ordinary people will see what we mean. When we insist that a Christian world-view is a fully-orbed view of the world, non-Christians need not dispense with everything they know, but add that extra set of lenses to common sense-type insights.

Of course, it needs to be said in closing, that Christians must act Christianly towards others in discussing these matters. We who say we have

the best view of reality must not come to others in triumphalism. Modesty and humility are becoming traits. Even if we have all the lenses of our glasses on fully, we still see through those glasses darkly. And, when we become arrogant and militant we must recall that Jehovah sits in the heavens and laughs when we imagine vain things.

Having said what we have said about the nature of the historical task, it would seem that the vocation of the Christian historian is four-fold. First, we must get out of Christian ghettos and speak to our disciplinary colleagues at large, in journals and in books likely to receive serious criticism. In short, we must speak *in* professional historical circles. Second, we must also speak *to* professional historical circles about the God who is there, and in whom reality finally consists. Third, we must speak *to* the church. Our fellow believers need the insights which a fully-orbed gospel view of reality can give. Finally, we must speak *in* the church, because it is only in fellowship with believers that we can continually have kept before us that beyond the professional study of history is seeking first the Kingdom of God.[17]

NOTES

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2. W. Stanford Reid, "The Problem of the Christian Interpretation of History," *Fides et Historia*, 5 (Spring, 1973), pp. 97-98.
3. Quoted in C.T. McIntire (ed.), *God, History and Historians* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 28.
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10. E. H. Carr, *What Is History?* (New York: Knopf, 1964).
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13. George M. Marsden, "Common Sense and the Siritual Vision of History," in C. T. McIntire and Ronald A. Wells (eds.), *History and Historical Understanding* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984).
14. *Ibid.*
15. Nicholas P. Wolterstorff, *Reason Within the Bounds of Religion* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).
16. C. T. McIntire, "Historical Study and the Historical Dimension of Our World", in McIntire and Wells, *History and Historical Understanding*.
17. Mark A. Noll, "The Conference on Faith and History and the Study of Early American History", *Fides et Historia* (Fall, 1978), pp. 8-18.

The Church—Today and Tomorrow

by ALAN FLAVELLE

What is the way forward for the church in our land? Is it to be evolution or revolution? William Temple, one of the most perceptive of Anglicans, pointed out that "the supreme wonder of the Christian Church is that always, in moments when it has seemed most dead, out of its own body there has sprung up new life, so that in age after age it has renewed itself". Howard Snyder, on the other hand, claimed that "for a radical gospel (the biblical kind) we need a radical church (the biblical kind). For the ever-new wine we must constantly have new wineskins. In short, we need a cataclysm".

We must bear in mind what the church essentially is. Hans Kung, the progressive Roman Catholic scholar, says: "[the church] is the community of the new people of God called out and called together". The emphasis here is salutary: people, the people of God, the people of God in community. As John Havlik says: "the church (in Scripture) is never a place, but always a people; never a fold, but always a flock; never a sacred building, but always a believing community". In other words, the church is to be seen, in Peter's phrase, as "God's own people".

However there is another side to the church, the institutional side. Any group of people, meeting together regularly, doing things together, inevitably becomes an institution. Whenever we give form or order to an activity, it becomes institutional. When our way of doing things becomes ineffective or unproductive, the institution that we have created no longer fulfils the purpose for which we created it. What we need then is institutional renewal. Where this is not possible, old structures or patterns of behaviour have to be discarded and new ones developed. What we must see to in church life is that the institutional element remains functional; that is, it must work.

Before we proceed too far in attempting to analyse or to criticise the institution we must look first of all at *THE SPIRIT THAT WE SHOW WITHIN TODAY'S CHURCH.*

Certain things are obvious. There is *defective commitment*. Paul exemplifies the spirit of total commitment when he says: "for me to live is Christ" . . . "we make it our aim to please him" . . . "one thing I do . . . I press on". It seems to me that the commitment that most people in our congregations make to Christ and the Church is but one commitment among many—on a par with what they make to, say, the Rotary Club or the Women's Institute, the Masonic Lodge or the Evening Class. They do not seem to see that the commitment for which Jesus Christ calls is of a totally different order. Julius Nyerere of Tanzania once told John Stott that when he meets someone who claims to be a committed Christian, he immediately

asks the question: "committed to what?" Relatively few of us are prepared for a specific commitment to one responsibility, especially if it threatens to disturb our comfortable way of life. Sir John Lawrence, a leading Anglican, puts it like this: "What does the average church member want? He wants a building that looks like a church . . . services of the kind he's been used to . . . ministers who dress in the way he approves of . . . and to be left alone!"

There is *limited expectation*. By and large, when we plan our programmes or outline our objectives, we look for the achievable—nothing more. We never put ourselves out on a limb (like Elijah on Carmel or Peter with the lame man) where we count on God alone. I have been greatly encouraged by what has been happening in the congregation of College Hill Presbyterian Church in Cincinnati. There has been a genuine work of spiritual renewal which has affected many people. Jerry Kirk, the pastor, traces this back to a moment when one of his members asked him: "what would you be attempting for God in College Hill if you had no thought of failure?" He saw in a flash that he had not been looking for things which only God could do. Part of our trouble in the church is that we have cut God down to our own size, imposing upon Him our own limitations. We do not "expect great things from God"; nor do we "attempt great things for God".

There is *superficial fellowship*. The New Testament always sees the life of the Christian as life in community. All-too-often we imagine that we can 'go it alone', ignoring the fact that we are "members one of another". How easily we hide ourselves from one another, striking a pose, building a façade; we are not willing to be open and honest with one another. Anything approaching true fellowship makes us feel threatened. In evangelical churches in particular we think it necessary to project a success image; we give the impression that we have everything neatly worked out—with no unanswered questions, no nagging doubts, no unmastered sins. And the sham of it all stinks! So often needy people are kept at a distance because we seem so self-assured, almost inhuman in our self-sufficiency. We need to tear off our masks, to let ourselves be seen as we really are—poor sinners living only by the grace of God.

There is *counterfeit religion*. A question asked by one of my younger friends struck home: "why are there so many phonies around the churches?" Why indeed? For so many of us, religion becomes a substitute for God, and where this happens the whole thing is a sham. How naturally we act a part or live a lie, showing that there is a Pharisee in the heart of every man. John Poulton says that "what communicates today is personal authenticity in a world self-consciously drilled to reject anything that is in the least bit phoney". Many people cry out for the real thing, yet this is often conspicuous only by its absence in our churches. Here is a question which posits something theologically unthinkable, but which also presents a challenge: "If God could die, and died tomorrow, how long would it be before the people in your church found out?" Part of the trouble in Ireland

arises from an inadequate experience of conversion. Many people, I am convinced, go through what is a purely cultural conversion, in which they exchange what I may call a 'worldly' pattern of self-centredness—centred in the pub or the dance-hall or the cinema—for a religious pattern of self-centredness—centred in the prayer-meeting or the Bible-study group. The heart remains unchanged. Genuine Christian experience only comes when we are radically altered, with life centred in, and controlled by, Jesus Christ.

What is missing among us is the breath of reality—the total commitment, the expectant spirit, the warm, open one-anotherness, the heart-religion, that carry the ring of truth. This I suggest, is not unconnected with what we must look at next: *THE STRUCTURES THAT WE USE WITHIN TODAY'S CHURCH.* Dr. J. Packer, speaking to the Council of the Evangelical Alliance, said: "One of the biggest hindrances to effective evangelism is that local churches, for the most part, are bound hand-and-foot by traditional, inward-looking structures. The problem is that these structures are virtuous—God has honoured them in the past—but because they are virtuous very few see clearly that they have become demonic—in the sense that the old enemy uses them to make it impossible for church people . . . to engage in creative evangelistic activity".

In part the problem is due to the unbiblical models of the church with which we work. Four of these have a decisive effect on our thinking: firstly, we see the church as a lecture hall, where believers go to hear a message expounded; secondly, we see the church as a theatre, where the faithful gather to see a performance presented by professionals; thirdly, we see the church as a corporation, efficient and programme-oriented, with a full-time staff to carry out the wishes of the people; finally we see the church as a social club, existing primarily for the enjoyment of its members, where they have certain needs met, in the same way as certain other needs are met by other organisations to which they belong.

Working with such models gives rise to a number of grave weaknesses in church-life. First, there is the *one-man ministry*, which makes the tacit claim that in the person of one full-time, well-trained 'minister' reside all the gifts needed to enable the people of God in the congregation to function as a community of faith. In most cases, if you take the minister away, the church ceases to operate—that is, unless a substitute can be found who is cut in the same omni-competent mould! According to Ephesians 4, the members are not in the church to enable the minister to fulfil his ministry, but he is there to equip them to fulfil their ministry. He trains or coaches them, but they do the vital work. This is not to play-down the role of the teacher-pastor; it is simply to set him free to do the work for which he is called. Incidentally, I feel that one of the reasons why so few of our ministers develop their own particular gifts to the full is that the system within which they work makes it impossible. It forces them to be "jack of all trades and master of none". Here is a test for a minister to face: do you train your gifted people so effectively that, even in your prolonged absence, the church can function at full throttle?

Then we have *the spectator-membership*, comprising people who, or the most part, are uninformed and uninvolved. Once a church member gets the idea that he 'goes to church' to listen, to watch, to pay his way, to enjoy himself—and nothing more—he will never see himself as a member of the crew or a worker on the team. At best he will be a spectator or passenger; at worst, a critic and a parasite. He will never learn by participation; he will never feel responsible; he will never get beyond the baby-stage where he is content to be spoon-fed. Such a person does not recognise that Christ gives gifts to every Christian, that all the gifts must be used together, and that a congregation only reaches maximum efficiency when all the gifts are in operation. Where gifts are not being used, where members are not playing their part, the whole life of the church is being deprived. I recently heard a minister sat that 98% of his members never meet for prayer, never come to a Bible study, never engage in any kind of service. I felt it necessary to ask: is this in fact the church of Jesus Christ?

Think also of the *man-centred* worship, which brings no sense that God is in the midst. How seldom our people see that we worship God simply because He is God. We worship Him not because we are needy, but because He is worthy. How easily we forget that in every act of worship God is the audience. It is not that the 'up-fronters'—minister, organist, choir—can offer something to the 'back-seaters'—people in the pews; but that 'up-fronters' and 'back-seaters' together offer something to God. He is the one to whom the worship must be acceptable. Response to a service then should not so much be 'I enjoyed that' or 'that singing was great', but rather the inarticulate and iffable sense that He was there and that He has been honoured by what we have done. One significant thing that has come home to me recently: older people like a form of service which is predictable—and feel threatened and uneasy when it is altered, while younger people like it to be varied and flexible—otherwise they feel bored. I sometimes think of it like this: because my wife is a living person, I have no reason to think that she would want me to tell her in exactly the same way several times a week that I love her. Why then should we imagine that God wants us to tell Him the same thing in the same way twice every week, fifty-two Sundays in the year? Surely since God is infinitely great, the ways in which we extol Him as the Greatest are (almost) infinitely variable. On the other hand, there is no virtue in 'change for the sake of change'. There is even less in what I call 'evangelical show-business', where every gimmick in the book is tried in an endless quest to vary the 'programme' to amuse the audience. A. W. Tozer, who speaks of worship as "the missing jewel of the church", makes this staggering claim: "it is almost impossible to gather a crowd where God is the only attraction".

Finally, there are the *bureaucratic strait-jackets* , with a built-in resistance to change. Every institution has its own bureaucracy, even where it operates behind the scenes. Many of our practices and procedures, our rules and regulations, were evolved at a time when society was far less complex, when the church could count on the loyalty of most of the population, when education was limited to the favoured few. Now the

situation is very different. Take some examples from our own Church. Why should one minister be employed full-time in serving a hundred families in the country when another man is over-taxed in serving five hundred families in a largely secularised urban area? Or why should the church abdicate responsibility for the inner-city when it becomes impossible to maintain existing buildings or established structures? Or why should we slow dow the move towards team-ministries because officials tell us that "we must not proceed too quickly"? It is not without significance that in North America almost all the growing churches are independent in polity. Personally, I do not believe that the concept of an autonomous church is biblical, but there can be no doubt that such churches are free to get on with the job, unshackled by stultifying traditions. We are at a stage where flexible organisation, readiness to experiment and new patterns of church-life are urgently needed. I often think of the progress of Singapore. Its growth and prosperity may be traced to an attitude epitomised in the words of her Prime Minister, Lee Kwan Yew: "change is the essence of life. The moment we cease to change, to be able to adapt, to adjust, to respond effectively to new situations, then we have begun to die". Oh that the church would learn!

This brings us to another factor that we must examine: *THE STANCE THAT WE TAKE WITHIN TODAY'S CHURCH.* Here many different things call for comment, and I can only say a brief word about each.

(i) *We tend to concentrate on maintenance rather than mission.* One of my colleagues, David Lapsley, put it like this: "If we maintain numbers, if we maintain income at a higher level than expenditure, if we can maintain our buildings, then we feel we have fulfilled our responsibility". He adds: "too often we dissipate our energies on trivialities . . . self-preservation and the cross cannot belong together". One glaring example of this can be seen in the mainline churches in the Republic of Ireland, where they seem to see their work merely in terms of a holding operation. There is no sign of vision of, or commitment to, the growth of the church. How often the agenda in church committees is taken up entirely with fabric or finance. Even where growth is sought, we aim at growth by transfer—that is by drawing members from other congregations—rather than growth by conversion—winning new people from the ranks of the unchurched.

(ii) *We preserve a middle-class orientation.* Writing of the North American scene, Bruce Kenrick says: "Instead of seeking the lost sheep—whether black or white or speckled—[Protestants] sought out those who thought as they thought, dressed as they dressed, talked as they talked . . . The Protestant church was cutting itself off from them and neglecting the fact that the sign of the Kingdom is that the poor have the Gospel preached unto them". David McKenna, in similar vein, pointing out that poor people, when converted, "move up a class", says: "by leaving the ghetto behind, the church has implied that its mission is meaningless to the poor, the hopeless, and the wretched—except where an ocean separates the church from the ghetto". What really vigorous evangelistic programme is sponsored by any of the mainline churches in downtown Belfast today?

(iii) *We betray a denominational bias*. Most of us are seen to be good party men and women. In larger gatherings, we gravitate to those of our own kind; often in all kinds of subtle ways we sell-short those who do not go to the same place as we do or believe exactly the same things as we believe. When major issues are involved, we are prepared to play it safe with people of our own sort, rather than risk an independent stand with Christians of other traditions. In all the thirteen years of Ulster's Troubles, for example, evangelicals have never once come together to speak a word to the situation. In a day of unprecedented opportunity in the Republic, where there is an open-door for a broad-based evangelical approach, what do we find? A hectic rush in denominational empire-building, all of us eager to advance our own little cause. So we face the frightening prospect of a proliferation of the denominational churches so vividly portrayed in Saturday night's *Belfast Telegraph*. And all in the name of Christian outreach!

(iv) *We accept the political captivity of the church*. In many places in this country Ulster Protestantism passes without question as biblical Christianity, when in fact the former owes more to our culture than to Scripture. Commonly we confuse loyalty to Crown and Constitution with loyalty to Christ and the Gospel. How sadly we have departed from the simplicity that is in Christ, importing into the Gospel ideas that are utterly alien to its truth. We will not accept people simply because they believe in Jesus Christ, but add as necessary to salvation all sorts of conditions of our own. "Faith-in-Christ-plus" is the formula we employ: faith in Crhist plus allegiance to a certain political party . . . or to a certain cultural lifestyle . . . or to a certain social pattern. "How can anyone be a true Protestant and not be a Loyalist?" asks a correspondent to one of our papers, not aware of the fact that, rightly understood one is a religious term and the other a political term. Very seldom is it admitted among us that one can be a perfectly orthodox Christian and not be a Unionist; or that one can be a true evangelical and reject outright the politics of extremism. Indeed, if I may 'raise a hare', I have often wondered why Ulster evangelicals are so determined to maintain the link with what is a virtually pagan Britain whose spiritual values and moral standards are increasingly decadent. It cannot be argued that we adopt this stance on purely biblical grounds!

Lest it be thought that I am concentrating too much on diagnosis and too little on prescription of a cure, let me add some observations that are more positive. What would I liek to see evolve as we go forward with Christ? What is *THE STRATEGY THAT WE NEED IN TODAY'S CHURCH?* All I can offer is a set of guidelines, guidelines which I believe can be deduced from Scripture itself. Here are my priorities for the church in our land.

(i) *A prophetic ministry*: that is, a ministry that brings "the whole counsel of God" to bear upon the entire spectrum of human life. We need preachers who will not only proclaim the Word of God faithfully, but who will apply the Word faithfully. Perhaps the gravest weakness of the Ulster pulpit lies just here. Haddon Robinson, who has written a helpful book on

preaching, makes this point:

> *"If a man or woman decides to live under the mandate of Scripture, action will normally take place outside the church building. On the outside, people lose jobs, worry about their children, and find crabgrass invading their lawns. Seldom do people lose sleep over the Jebusites, the Canaanites or the Perizzites, or even about what Abraham or Paul or Moses has said or done. They lie awake wondering about grocery prices, crop failures, quarrels with a girl friend, diagnosis of a malignancy, a frustrating sex life, or the rat race where only the rats seem to win. If a sermon doesn't make much difference in that world, they wonder if it makes any difference at all".*

Not only so, but we must get to grips with something over-and-above such indivdual concerns. We must apply the Gospel to the complex issues of society with which people have to grapple from day to day: poverty, hunger, unemployment, social justice, the arms race, class structures. "These", as John Stott says, "are the questions which fill our newspapers . . . How then can we ban them from the pulpit? If we do so in order to concentrate on 'spiritual' topics, we perpetuate the disastrous separation of the sacred from the secular . . . we divorce Christian faith from Christian life; we encourage a pietistic withdrawal from the real world; we justify Marx's well-known criticism that religion is an opiate which drugs people into acquienscence with the status quo; and we confirm non-Christians in their sneaking impression that Christianity is irrelevant". To what extent, we may ask, is the state of our society an indictment of the church's failure to give the biblical point of view on the whole of life, to spell out and to drive home the moral implications of the Gospel? If a minister says, "I keep politics out of the pulpit", can he absolve himself from all responsibility for the sub-Christian sentiments that people express and the unChristlike attitudes they display?

(ii) *A charismatic community*, that is, a community of people saved by the grace of God and blessed with the gifts of grace. We must create structures and patterns of worship in which these gifts are recognised for what they are, brought to maximum usefulness, and employed for the enrichment of the whole church. We must keep saying to our people—and to ourselves—know your gifts; train your gifts; use your gifts. I do not believe that all the gifts given by God to the New Testament church are present in any of today's churches; but I am convinced that God gives to His church in every age and in every place precisely those gifts which are needed for the enrichment of the church's life and the fulfilment of the church's task. How much congregational life is impoverished by our neglect of the gifts of grace. From my own experience, I can say that I have been surprised and excited in discovering such a variety of gifts among God's people. Many leaders within the mainline churches are rather afraid of excess and excitement; others have been grieved because of the presence of spurious gifts. This must not make us fear the Holy Spirit. As Tozer says: "The Holy Spirit is always the cure, never the cause, of fanaticism". We

must look to Him, the Lord and Giver of life, to revive our stagnant congregations. Cardinal Newman likened the church to an equestrian statue: the front legs are raised, ready to leap forward; the muscles of the back legs stand out, bulging with strength. As you look at the statue you expect it to spring forward at any moment. But, come back in twenty years, and it has not moved an inch. How like most of the churches I know!

(iii) *An eschatological perspective.* Two things are stressed in the New Testament teaching on the Kingdom of God: it is in one sense "here and now"; in another sense it is "not yet". As Christians, we already share in the life of the world to come; united to Christ in His death and resurrection, we have been brought into a totally new order of existence. But, for all that, our salvation is not yet complete. We are on the way, but we have not yet arrived. Thus Visser't Hooft can say: "To build the church is not to build a solid institution . . . at home in the world . . . It is rather to organise a band of pilgrims on the way to a new and better country". The goal towards which we strive determines the direction in which we move. As individuals we are told to be "perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect", and though we shall never attain that standard this side of heaven, all our efforts must be directed towards attaining it. We are exhorted in Paul's Letter to the *Ephesians* to show that the church is one, and while we may never fully display that unity on this earth, all our planning and praying must be done in the light of the ideal. We are encouraged to look to the day when "the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ", and though that day may be yet far-distant, we must toil and travail to give expression to the values of the Kingdom in the here and now. These goals must be pursued continually, even while we recognise that they are always beyond us in this world. Church-life then must be a foretaste of the Kingdom that is yet to be. Stephen Travers puts it this way: "If we are pilgrims, if our destiny is beyond this present age, we dare not allow the church to be an unchanging institution with vested interests and fossilised structures". Rather let us seek to be "the community of the King"—on the march. Thus the church in the world must combine detachment and involvement. We are detached from it, since we know that it is passing away; we are involved in it, since we know ourselves to be agents of God Incarnate.

(iv) *A distinctive lifestyle.* If we are "partakers of the divine nature", if we are "being renewed in the inner man after the image of Christ" then something of this must shine through. "Politically", J. H. Yoder reflects, "the novelty which God brings into the world is a community of those who serve, instead of ruling; who suffer, instead of inflicting suffering; whose fellowship crosses social lines, instead of reinforcing them". David Watson points out that in secular Greek the word "glory" means either "reputation" or "opinion". He says: "It is a sobering truth that God's reputation in the world, or the world's opinion of God, will depend to a large extent on how far His glory is seen in the church". How well do we demonstrate the nature of God? Is what we present to the world not all-too-often a miserable

caricature of Him who is the one living and true God? One of the ways in which churches can evince a distinctive lifestyle is by cultivating fellowship-in-depth. People want to know that they belong, that they are accepted, that they are loved, but so often church-life fails to meet that need. In his book, *The Dynamics of Spiritual Life*, Richard Lovelace says: "A dissolving of local congregations into house churches, independent communes or elite task-forces would not only disrupt communication; it might create structures which do not by themselves have the power to carry forward the whole people of God . . . with the same effectiveness as parish churches. The local congregation is like a whaling-ship. It is too large and unwieldy in itself to catch whales, so it must carry smaller vessels aboard for this purpose. But the smaller whale-boats are ill-advised to strike out on their own apart from the mother ship. They can catch a few whales, but they cannot process them, and the smaller boats can easily be destroyed". This gives us a useful paradigm of church-life. Commenting on the need for small fellowship groups, Lovelace can say: "Without such mechanisms for the interchange of grace and the movement of known truth into action, the weekly pattern of church attendance can become a stagnant routine consisting of the passive intake of truth which is never turned into prayer and work for the Kingdom". We must be seen as people who care for one another, who learn from one another, who work with one another, who trust one another, as members of the one family of faith.

(v) *An openness both to the Word and the Spirit.* Many Christians emphasise the Word but neglect the Spirit; this breeds a dull and deadening orthodoxy. It also accounts for the fact that so many who claim an unimpeachable orthodoxy display such unChristlike attitudes. Others emphasise the Spirit but neglect the Word; this creates a shallow sentimentalism or even a superficial sensationalism, and it can give such prominence to the gifts of the Spirit that it ignores the fruit of the Spirit. What we need to see with fresh clarity is that God acts and speaks by His Spirit through the Word. Thus there must be no false dichotomy between doctrine and experience; we need both. We live in a world where people are impatient of dogma. What they want to know about a thing is simply this: does it work? But, as Os Guinness says: "Christianity is not true because it works. It works because it is true . . . The uniqueness and trustworthiness of Christianity rest entirely on its claim to be the truth". So we cannot dispense with doctrine because we think it divisive or distracting. The quality of our experience depends upon the quality of our faith, but the quality of our faith depends upon the quality of our understanding of God's truth. On the other hand, those of us who emphasise the authority of the Word and the 'givenness' of what we have in Jesus Christ, must face the searching challenge of some words spoken by Dr. Martin Lloyd-Jones: "Got it all? Well, if you have 'got it all', I simply ask, in the name of God why are you as you are? If you have got it all, why are you so unlike the New Testament Christians? Got it all at your conversion? Well, where is it, I ask?" There is no way in which the more traditional

evangelical can evade that question. If it is true that some have 'too much in the heart and too little in the head', the alternative is equally futile, to have 'too much in the head and too little in the heart'. What we need is to be, at one and the same time, obedient to the Word and 'under the influence' of the Spirit.

To sum up, I am not persuaded that revolution is necessary. David Watson rightly urges that "revolutions are aptly named: they revolve. They turn one lot of sinners out and put another lot of sinners in. The trouble with virtually all forms of revolution is that they change everything—except the human heart. And until that is changed, nothing is significantly different in the long run". I have no doubt that God is alive and at work in His church today, in judgment and in mercy, prompting us to prune away all that impedes the in-flow or out-flow of life, and to foster all that promotes the health of the Body. We are at a stage in Ireland where the pruning needs to be drastic, but we can tackle the task firm in the confidence that "God purposes a crop", as Samuel Rutherford put it. Howard Snyder reminds us that "there is something spontaneous about genuine growth. Normal growth does not depend upon successful techniques or programmes, although planning has its place. Rather, growth is the normal consequence of spiritual life. What is alive grows . . . the nature of the church is to grow spiritually, numerically and in its cultural impact". Looking at the wider perspective, we must remember that the church of Jesus Christ is growing more rapidly than at any time in its history—more than 25,000 new members being added to the church every day. We are part of something which has "a wonderful past and a glorious future".

We desperately need 'the wind from heaven' to blow upon the church in our land. And who can doubt that already there is a gentle breeze? On our part there is urgent need for a fuller and deeper commitment to the Person of Christ. Who can doubt that David Watson is on target when he tells us that the "vast majority of Western Christians are church-members, pew-fillers, hymn-singers, sermon-tasters, Bible-readers, even born-again believers and Spirit-filled Charismatics—but not true disciples of Jesus"? "If we were willing to learn the meaning of real discipleship, and actually to become disciples", he adds, "the church in the West would be transformed, and the resultant impact on society would be staggering".

Let me finish with this. Winston Churchill was very fond of Gibbon's book, *The Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire*. One evening during the Second World War, he had been viewing in his private cinema a long and sickening scene from *Quo Vadis?* which is based on Gibbon. Following a much-needed interval, Churchill recited with perfect accuracy this passage from the book: "While that great body [the Empire] was invaded by open violence, or undermined by slow decay, a pure and humble religion gently insinuated itself into the minds of men, grew up in silence and obscurity, derived new vigour from opposition, and finally erected the banner of the Cross on the ruins of the capital". There you have the glory of the church's

past; there too you have the hope of the church's future— a hope grounded in the very nature of the God who comes to us in Jesus Christ and who works in us by His Spirit.

Christianity and Zionism

by DWIGHT W. VAN WINKLE

The Israeli invasion of Lebanon and the massacres of innocent Palestinians have led Americans to question their nation's relationship with Israel. These events have raised a special problem for evangelical Christians. Does the Bible demand Americans as a nation, or as Christians, to support Israel in their foreign policy regardless of the morality of her actions? In the past many evangelicals have answered this question in the affirmative. They have asserted that God gave special unconditional promises to Israel. He promised her that those nations who bless her will be blessed and those nations who curse her will be cursed. They conclude, therefore, that God will judge the U.S. based on the way that it treats Israel. If the U.S. blesses Israel by supplying economic and military aid, God will bless it. If, however, the U.S. does not supply this aid, or even worse from their perspective, gives aid to Arab countries, it will not be blessed. For example, Jerry Falwell remarks, " . . . if Israel acts in a sinful manner, no one should condone such actions. That, however, has nothing to with Israel's right to exist, its right to the land, its future position in the kingdom ,or the fact that God will fulfill his promise in Genesis 12:3."[1]

Since the issue of Christianity and Zionism revolves around the proper interpretation of patriarchal promises, we must examine the passages which contain divine promises to the patriarchs. We must ask three questions. What is promised? To whom is the promise made? And is the promise conditional or unconditional? The passages which are the most relevant to this issue are found in Genesis 12:1-3, 15, 17; 22:16-18 and 26:5. In addition, it is important to determine how the rest of the canon interacts with the patriarchal promises.

The first passage we will examine is Genesis 12:1-3. The Revised Standard Version (RSV) translates this passage as follows:

> *Now the Lord said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who curses you I will curse; and by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves."*

The RSV adds in a footnote the alternative reading to the last part of verse three: "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

In this passage God promises Abraham that He will make of him a great nation, that He will bless him, that his reputation will be great and that he will be a blessing. Verse three spells out the nature of this blessing. God will bless those (note that in the Hebrew the pronoun is plural) who bless Abraham and curse the one (note that in the Hebrew the pronoun is singular)

who curses him. Perhaps the variation of the plural and the singular shows God's predisposition to bless.[2]

The final part of this verse creates problems for interpreters. If the verse is translated "by you all the families of the earth shall bless themselves", it means that Abraham's blessing will be so great that it will be proverbial. The nations would wish that they could be as blessed as Abraham. If the verse is translated "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed", it means that Abraham will be an agent of blessing to the nations. Since each of the interpretations rests on legitimate translations of the Hebrew text, we must look to the context to help us decide which interpretation is proper.

Genesis 12 links the call of the patriarchs to the primaeval stories of Genesis 1-11. In Genesis 1-11 there are two major literary patterns. The stories are arranged in such a way as to show a decline in human morality.[3] In the first story the serpent has to talk mankind into sinning (Gen. 3:1-6). In the second story in which Cain slays his brother, Abel, God cannot talk man out of sinning (4:6-7). In the follwing flood story the wickedness of man has led to a perversion of the order of creation and God is sorry that he made man (6:5-7). Although God spares the faithful few, Noah and his family, he brings destruction upon mankind. Finally, in the story of the tower of Babel all mankind has conspired against God (11:4). Since in this story there is no righteous remnant and since mankind rejected God's authority even after the second chance they received after the flood, the story also shows the decline in human morality and responsiveness to God. This literary pattern is significant, since in Genesis 12 it seems that God has decided to work with one man rather than all of mankind.

The other major literary pattern in Genesis 1-11 is the repetition of the motif of sin, judgment, and grace.[4] In the first story Adam and Eve sin by eating of the forbidden fruit. God judges them by casting them out of the garden; however, God manifests his grace by sparing their lives. Although God threatened immediate death for transgression of his commandment, he mitigated this judgment by his grace. In the second story, Cain sins by slaying Abel. God judges Cain by cutting him off from the land and making him a fugitive. God manifests his grace by providing a protective mark. In the flood story man sins continually. God judges mankind by bringing a flood which destorys all flesh. God's grace is shown, however, in that Noah and his family and several animals are spared. In addition, God promises never again to bring universal destruction even though man is evil from his youth (8:21-22). In the final story of the tower of Babel, man sins by building a tower with its top in the heavens. God judges mankind by confusing their language. It is significant that this story ends on the note of divine judgment. God does not mediate his judgment with grace. He does exactly what he said he would do.

The call of Abraham fits into this motif by providing the element of grace. It completes the story of the tower of Babel. God has judged mankind who had become progressively worse. In the call of Abraham, God is selecting a person to be his representative to the world and an agent of

salvation for mankind. Therefore, the translation "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" and the interpretation which envisages Abraham becoming an agent of salvation for mankind are preferred. Thus, in Genesis 12:1-3, God promises Abraham that he will be a source of blessing for all mankind.[5]

Regarding Genesis 12:1-3, the third question with which we must deal involves the conditional character of the promise. This question is significant, because if God's promise to Abraham was unconditional, then the promise which was extended to his descendants might be unconditional as well. We should observe that Abraham is told to leave his land, kindred and father's house. This would appear to set a condition for the promise. Cleon L Rogers Jr. remarks that even though there may be a condition expressed by the imperative, the stress is not upon the imperative as a condition, but rather on the cohortative and the purpose or intention expressed by it.[6] Hans Walter Wolff adds, "The preceding imperative does not thereby have any kind of conditional undertone, as if the promise of Yahweh were dependent upon the obedience of Abraham."[7]

Even if the emphasis is upon the blessing that Abraham will receive, the fact remains that the promises are conditioned by Abraham's obedience. Wolff overplays his hand, since in Hebrew as in English condition and consequence may be expressed by a simple juxtaposition of two clauses.[8] If Abraham leaves, he will become a great nation, he will be blessed and his name will be great. If he obeys, God will bless those who bless him, curse the one who curses him and in him all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

The promise in Genesis 12:1-3 is conditioned by Abraham's faith, which would be manifested by his leaving his land, kindred and father's house. As James Muilenburg points out, "It is a heavy burden that Yahweh calls upon Abram to bear . . . All that gives a man identity and security in the ancient world of the Near East is denied him. He must sacrifice these stabilities and go forth to a land the name of which he is not even told."[9]

The next passage which is germane to the issue of the promises to the patriarchs is Genesis 15. In this passage God promises Abraham a son, a multitude of descendants and land from the river of Egypt to the river Euphrates. Furthermore, God tells him to cut various animals in two and place their carcasses side by side. While Abraham slept, God, symbolized by a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch, passed between the carcasses. While the significance of this ceremony may not be comprehensible to us, it would be understood by Abraham. In the ancient world when kings wanted to make treaties with one another, they would cut animals in two and arrange the carcasses on opposite sides of a path. The person bound by an obligation of the treaty would walk between the bodies. This practice is also reflected in Jeremiah 35:17ff. Since God is the only one who passes between the carcasses, the promises are unconditional and God is unilaterally obliged to keep the covenant according to Genesis 15.[10]

In Genesis 17, God again appears to Abraham and promises him that

he will be the father of a multitude of nations. God promises an everlasting covenant relationship with his descendants and that his descendants will have the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession. This presentation of the covenant relationship differs from its presentation in Genesis 15, however, since the promises seem to be presented as conditional promises. In Genesis 17:1-2 God tells Abraham to walk before Him and be blameless and He will make a covenant with him. The sign of this covenant will be circumcision. This passage presents a problem. Whereas Genesis 15 presented the covenant as an unconditional covenant, Genesis 17 seems to present this as an explicitly conditional one. Abraham must walk before God blamelessly for this covenant to be in place. This is not a new covenant. Instead, it is a restatement of the previous covenant, yet apparently having an explicit conditionality.

Both Rogers and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr. argue that in Genesis 17 the covenant is not presented as a conditional one. They note that since the two imperatives are followed by two cohortative imperfects, the stress is upon what Yahweh will do. Furthermore, it is argued that since the promises have already been given previously *we'ettenah* in verse 2, which is usually translated "I will make" or "I will establish", in reality should be translated "I will make operative the one that is in force."[11] Kaiser avers, "The identical argument would apply for 17:9-14 where circumcision might, at first blush, seem like another condition on the promise. But verse 11 completely settled the argument: circumcision was only a "sign" of the covenant, not its condition."[12] Ronald E. Clements adds that in this passage the covenant is an unconditional one having permanent validity since it is presented as an "everlasting covenant" (*berît ôlam*).[13]

Regarding the first argument, while the stress may be upon the promises, the conditional aspect of the promise remains, as was pointed out earlier. Concerning the proposed translation of *wesettenáh*, that this should be translated "I will make" is borne out by the parallel expression *wahâqimotî 'et-berîtî* which means "I will establish my covenant" and does not mean "to make operative the one that is in force" as shown by its usage in Genesis 9:9, 11, 17. Verses 17:9-14 do demand circumcision since, as verse 14 indicates, an uncircumcised male is excluded from the community of faith. Even if circumcision is a sign, it is a sign which is a condition of the covenant. As for the argument that the covenant is eternal and therefore unconditional, as will be pointed out, Psalm 132 affirms both the conditionality and the eternality of the Davidic covenant.

The next passage which is important for our study is Genesis 22:15-19. Following Abraham's demonstration of faith as shown by his willingness to sacrifice Isaac, the angel of the Lord calls to him and says that because he has done this, and has not withheld his only son, God will bless Abraham. In this passage Abraham is promised a multitude of descendants, that they will possess the gate of their enemies, and that through his descendants all the earth shall be blessed. This passage presents the covenant as a conditional one. Verse 16 states, ". . . because you have done this thing

. . ." and verse 18 concludes, " . . . because you have obeyed my voice."[14]

Finally, in Genesis 26:2-5, the blessing is repeated to Isaac and God promises to bless him and fulfil what he promised ". . . because Abraham obeyed my voice and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." This passage reiterates the patriarchal promises and presents them as conditioned by the manifestation of Abraham's faith.

The tension created by the conditional and unconditional presentation of the patriarchal covenant is also found in the Davidic covenant, since the latter is presented both as an unconditional covenant and as a conditional one. 2 Samuel 7, 1 Chronicles 17 and Psalm 89 present the Davidic covenant as an unconditional covenant. For example, in the midst of an exilic lament the psalmist asserts:

I will sing of thy steadfast love,
O Lord, for ever;
With my mouth I will proclaim thy
faithfulness to all generations.
For thy steadfast love was established for ever,
thy faithfulness is firm as the heavens.
Thou has said, "I have made a covenant
with my chosen one,
I have sworn to David my servant;
'I will establish your descendants for ever
and build your throne for all generations.'"

Since the monarchy was destroyed by the Babylonians, the psalmist concludes by asking:

Lord where is thy steadfast love of old,
which by thy faithfulness thou didst swear to David?

Psalm 132, however, presents the Davidic covenant as a conditional covenant when it states in verses 11-12:

The Lord swore to David a sure oath
from which he will not turn back:
"One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne.
If your sons keep my covenant
and my testimonies which I shall teach them,
their sons also for ever
shall sit upon your throne."

Note that verse 12 expresses the condition *if* your sons keep my covenant.[15]

Canonically, how do we resolve this tension between the conditional and unconditional presentations of a covenant? Perhaps the resolution to this tension lies in the proper understanding of covenant. A covenant entails a specification of obligations involved in a relationship. The obligations may be explicit, as in the case of a conditional covenant, or they may be implicit, as with an "unconditional" covenant. With reference to Genesis, the passage in Ch.17, 22:16-18 and 26:5 makes explicit what Genesis 15

leaves implicit.[16] God demands faith which manifests itself in righteousness. The descendants of Abraham are not merely his physical descendants. If this were the case, why is not Ishmael, the father of the Arabs, an heir to the promises of Israel? While it might be argued that the heirs of the promise are the descendants of Abraham and Sarah rather than those of Abraham and Hagar, this argument is not compelling, since Esau, who is a descendant of Abraham and Sarah, is not an heir of the promise. The descendants of Abraham are not merely those who are circumcised. indeed, Genesis 17:25 records that Ishmael was circumcised. The descendants of Abraham are those who are chosen by God and who respond to this choice by walking before God blamelessly.

Whereas the Abrahamic covenant is implicitly conditional and stresses God's commitment to Abraham's descendants, the Mosaic covenant is explicitly conditional and stresses Israel's responsibility. Exodus 19:5 declares, " . . . if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples; for all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." There is no unconditional presentation of the Mosaic covenant. According to this covenant, Israel's enjoyment of the land depends upon her obedience to the demands of God set forth at Sinai. Leviticus 18:24-28 decares that if Israel violates the covenant at Sinai the land will vomit them out. Deuteronomy 4:25-26 states that if Israel lapses into idolatry, they will soon utterly perish from the land and will not live long on it.

When the prophets take up the tradition of the patriarchal promises, they treat them as conditional promises. John Bright notes that if the text of Jeremiah 4:1-2 is trustworthy, "We seem to have here an allusion to, or even a citation of, the promise to Abraham as that is found in Genesis 18:18 and similar passages. As we read it in Genesis, the promise to Abraham carries no expressed conditions. But Jeremiah introduces one. He says that God will make good his promise to Abraham if—but only if—the people truly repent. Jeremiah knew of no unconditional promises."[17]

The prophet Ezekiel takes up the tradition of the patriarchal promises in Ezekiel 33:23-29.[18] During the exile there were some Israelites who remained in the land of Palestine while the rest of the nation was in exile in Babylon. With regard to those remaining in Palestine, they reasoned that Abraham was only one man and he possessed the land; they were many, therefore, they should possess the land. Their argument went as follows:

Abraham and his seed were promised this land.
The promise was unconditional.
We are Abraham's seed.
Therefore we shall possess the land.

Ezekiel responds to their argument by telling them that God will judge them because they have not behaved righteously. They have trusted in their own military might rather than trusting in God. According to Ezekiel it was not sufficient to be a mere physical descendant of Abraham. They had to manifest the faith of Abraham. Since they had failed to manifest this faith,

God would bring judgment rather than blessing. According to Ezekiel, the patriarchal promises were not unconditional.[19]

The New Testament is in harmony with this understanding of the patriarchal promises. In Romans 2:28-29 the apostle Paul testifies that physical circumcision counts for nothing. In Galations 3:16 he states, "Now the promises were made to Abraham and to his seed. It does not say 'and to seeds' referring to the many; but, referring to one, 'and your seed', which is Christ." According to Paul, the Abrahamic covenant finds its fulfilment in Christ. The relevance of this for the church is expressed by the apostle in Galatians 3:29 when he adds, "And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise." This means that the church and not Israel are the heirs of the patriarchal promises.

Concerning this line of argumentation, Falwell remarks, "I do not deny that the saved are the people of God. But we must also follow Scripture when it says Israel is God's special inheritance (Deut. 7:6-8; Ps. 135:4; Isa. 41:8-9), and when the New Testament teaches that God has not cast off his people Israel (Rom. 11:1-2, 11:25-27)."[20] As regards Falwell's use of the Old Testament, the Mosaic covenant explicitly, and the Abrahamic covenant at least implicitly, show that Israel is God's special inheritance only if they fulfill the demands of the covenant. As regards his use of the New Testament, Paul points out that God has not cast off Israel, because a remnant has been saved. In Romans 11:1-2 Paul notes that he himself is an example of this remnant since he is both a Christian and a physical descendant of Abraham. While Paul may anticipate the future salvation of his kinsmen in Romans 11:25-7, he argues that in their present state of unbelief they have been broken off the tree of God's kindness and that the Gentiles who believe in Christ have been grafted into the tree in their place (Romans 11:17-24). Referring to Israel, Paul states in Romans 11:23, "And even the others, if they do not persist in their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again." This means that Paul anticipates Israel's renewed status as the people of God only when they manifest faith in Christ. As for the present state of the Gentiles who believe in Christ, Paul writes in Romans 9:8 that it is not the children of flesh who are the children of God, but the children of promise who are reckoned as Abraham's descendants. This means that the Church and not Israel in its present state of unbelief are to be reckoned as Abraham's descendants.

It has been argued that the Old Testament recognizes the conditionality of the patriarchal promises, and that the New Testament views Christ and his body, the church, as the descendants of Abraham. If this conclusion is correct, the scriptures do not demand that the modern state of Israel be accorded any special treatment. God will not judge Americans, as Christians, or as a nation, based upon the amount of foreign aid we give to Israel.

If we are searching for an Old Testament standard against which American foreign policy can be judged, we should turn our attention to Amos 1:3-2:3. This passage is particularly relevant for the issue of foreign

policy, since Amos condemned the states surrounding Israel for their international sins. The standard which the prophet employed was the canon of universal law. According to Amos, Israel's neighbours were guilty of violating basic humanitarian principles and, therefore, were liable for judgment. Amos' condemnation of Moab in Amos 2:1-3 for her treatment of Edom demonstrates that the nations were not denounced simply for opposing Israel. They were denounced for their violations of human rights.

The canon of universal law and human rights provides a helpful standard for determining what the role of the United States should be in the Middle East. While humanitarian reasons may lead Americans to favour an independent secure Jewish homeland, they need not demand that they support every action undertaken by this nation. This same humanitarian interest may lead Anericans to favour an independent secure Palestinian homeland even though they may not support every action undertaken by this nation. This standard also demands that Americans should be actively working for peace rather than helping either side to wage war on the other.

NOTES

1. Jerry Falwell, "Jerry Falwell Objects", *Christianity Today*, 22 January 1982, p. 17.
2. Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis* (Philadelphia, 1972), pp. 159-60.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 75.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 152 ff.
5. Claus Westermann, *Genesis* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: 1982), pp. 175-76 argues that the variation between the passive and the reflexive is not significant since the reflexive "bless themselves by you" envisages the nations receiving a blessing since they would indirectly bless Abraham.
6. Cleon L. Rogers, Jr., "The Covenant with Abraham and its Historical Setting" *Bibliotheca Sacra* Vol. 127, (1970), p. 252.
7. Hans Walter Wolff, "The Kerygma of the Yahwist" *Interpretation*, Vol. 20, (1966), p. 138. It should be noted that scholars who argue for an unconditional Abrahamic covenant are not necessarily Christian Zionist.
8. E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* (Oxford, 1909), §159b.
9. James Muilenburg, "Abraham and the Nations: Bessing and World History" *Interpretation*, Vol. 19, (1965), p. 391.
10. John Bright, *Covenant and Promise* (Philadelphia, 1976), pp. 25-26.
11. Rogers, p. 253, and Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, 1978), p. 93.
12. Kaiser, p. 93.
13. Ronald E. Clements, *Abraham and David: Genesis 15 and Its Meaning for Israelite Tradition* (London, 1967), p. 71.
14. These and all scriptural citations are taken from the Revised Standard Version.
15. Frank Moore Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass. and London, 1973), pp. 94-97, 232-34 dates this psalm to the reign of David and notes that it may be the original formulation of the Davidic covenant.
16. If one is unwilling to permit diversity and implicit conditionality, and if one is forced, thereby, to select either a conditional or an unconditional Abrahamic covenant, one ought to select the former in view of the explicit presentations of conditionality in Genesis 12:1, 17:1-2, 22:16-18 and 26:5. One would also be forced to understand Genesis 15 as giving assurance to Abraham after he had manifested faith (15:6) which is the chief requirement of the covenant.

17. Bright, p. 160.
18. For a fuller treatment of this passage wee Walther Zimmerli *Ezechiel* (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1969) pp. 815-24 and "Prophetic Proclamation and Reinterpretation", in Douglas A. Knight (ed.) *Tradition and Theology in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia, 1977), p. 88.
19. James A. Sanders, "Hermeneutics in True and False Prophecy" in George W. Coats and Burke O. Long (eds.) *Canon and Authority* (Philadelphia, 1977), p. 32 notes that both Ezekiel 33 and Isaiah 51:2-3 use the same texts and hermeneutics but differ only because of contexts.
20. Falwell, p. 16.

History and the Shaping of Irish Protestantism

(Based on the Annual Theological Lectures delivered at the Queen's University of Belfast, 21st and 22nd February, 1983)

by DESMOND BOWEN

'History has mauled Ireland, but if we can prove ourselves able to learn from it, we may once again find ourselves in a position to teach'.
James Downey, *Them and Us: Britain, Ireland and the Northern Question, 1969-1982*, (Dublin, 1983)

The History

In a world filled with insurgent ethnic groups the importance of the role of 'peoples' in world development is being increasingly recognized in our day, and Arnold Toynbee has gone so far as to argue "it is the only intelligible unit of historical study".[1] The Protestants of Ireland have until now formed a people unit with a strong sense of identity based on a configuration of political and religious symbols by which they explain their history. The social orders in both north and south which have long nurtured them are changing rapidly, however, and as a people they are now suffering from what in modern jargon is called 'an identity crisis'. They are confused with their self-image, the understanding of themselves historically, and their relationship with other peoples, which has traditionally given them their identity. This paper addresses itself to this crisis, suggesting that a new consideration of Irish Protestant historical development might be of value to them in both self-understanding, and in terms of what they might contribute to the world as a consequence of their unique historical experience.

History has so shaped Irish Protestantism that to many outside observers its religious expression seems fossilized, caught up in passions that seem more appropriate to the seventeenth century, the age of religious wars in European history. In the face of such criticism the usual Irish Protestant response is to argue that though historical experience has shaped their own or any other presentation of the Christian faith, yet their cultural expression is based on the theology of the early church and the fathers of the Reformation era. They would agree with Paul Ricoeur that: "Religion is the 'ideological' side of faith in an absolutely primitive, foundational and fundamental sense of the word"[2] and they would not take kindly to suggestions of the need for religious or ideological reconsideration of their faith.

Lack of appreciation of the particularist presentation of the Christian

faith found in Ireland is nothing new, however. Following the golden age of the Celtic Church, the time when the teaching of Ireland's 'saints and scholars' gave so much to the western world, Irish churchmen tended to withdraw from the universal mission of the church. In fact, following the Danish and Norman invasions they became socially and culturally xenophobic, far removed in their religious practice from the mainstream of European development. Ideas of universal mission under the Providence of God were long forgotten, and the church seemed threatened with assimilation by the barbaric culture of the eternally warring tribal people on the island. So real was this danger that from the twelfth century onward reformers like Malachy and members of new religious orders devoted themselves to trying to bring a spirit of revival among Irish Christians, and to having them once more support the mission of the universal church.

This did not mean that the retrograde expression of the Christian faith which was accepted by the people of medieval Ireland was lacking in vitality. In fact the opposite was true, and only too easily the reforming ideals of Cluny, or the Cistercians, or the mendicant orders were assimilated by the Irish, absorbed into their primitive insular religious expression, without significantly changing the symbiotic relationship the church had with the barbarian culture in which it existed. The result of this was that Irish churchmen in the middle ages showed remarkably little interest in religious, political, social, legal, scientific or any other kind of cultural development. Ireland did not boast a university, the Renaissance had almost no influence, and by the time of the Reformation the church in Ireland was one of the most decadent in Europe. Perhaps its most significant feature was the deep division between the descendants of the Celts and those of the Anglo-Irish, both of whom strove for supremacy in church and society, caught up in tribal struggles and oblivious to what was developing in the universal church: "if the Irish mind was dwelling in the ninth century, the Anglo-Irish mind was still in the thirteenth or fourteenth".[3]

Neither of the Irish peoples were to be left in their state of atavistic isolation, however, for the focus of the great European power struggle in the Reformation period shifted from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic world. In strategic terms, Ireland, which had been freshly garrisoned by the Tudors was looked upon as the far western bastion of the nothern and Protestant line of battle. Spanish Catholic power could not resist trying to invade Ireland, to turn the flank of the Reformation, and both English and Scottish authorities determined to resist this threat by increasing their garrisons on the island. There had been Irish friars and a bishop with Fitzmaurice when he came from Spain to Dingle in 1579 "to deliver Ireland from both heresy and tyranny",[4] and there had been Irish priests aboard the Armada ships. By the time of the O'Neill rebellion it was clear to the authorities in London and Dublin that Roman Catholicism was not only of value to the 'wilde Irish' because it brought them continental reinforcement politically, but also because it united them with those of the old Anglo-Irish who resented the adventurers and planters who were coming

to the island.

The age when continental involvement in Irish affairs was greatest was the seventeenth century, when the ferocious spirit of Europe's religious struggle was added to the already bitter division between the majority Roman Catholic Irish and the minority Protestant new settlers. From the time of the papal nuncio Rinuccini who came to organize the Roman Catholic Irish following the massacres of 1641, until the coming of Protestant and Catholic generals who had fought in Europe's Thirty Years' War, followed then by Cromwell's army, the land was devastated and the people more and more bitterly divided as soldiers caught up in the political/religious hysteria of the time displayed little of Christian justice or mercy.

The Catholic historian Daniel-Rops has admitted that the spirit of the mid-seventeenth century Counter-Reformation can "hardly claim our admiration":

> *Up to the end of the century, and even beyond, the old ideal of fighting heresy with every possible weapon was maintained . . . Under an imperial edict of 1 February, 1650, any non-Catholic discovered in Bohemia after 15 March of that year was liable to death or life imprisonment.*[5]

One Protestant body which was decimated by the armies of the Duke of Savoy, reportedly with the aid of Irish Catholic soldiers, was the Waldenses who tried to survive a thirty-year campaign of extermination by taking refuge in the upper valleys of the Alps. News of their suffering reached Cromwell's soldiers in Ireland, who raised a fund for the refugees, many of whom were offered land in Ireland.[6] Though the Waldenses did not come, two groups of refugees from continental Catholic persecution, the French Huguenots and German Palatines came to Ireland only to find themselves confronted with Catholic enemies whom even the nuncio Rinuccini had found to be singularly barbarous and cruel.[7]

The European dimension of Ireland's seventeenth century political/religious struggle was most clearly revealed when the battles of the Boyne and Aughrim were fought by international Roman Catholic and Protestant armies. Among the Danish, Dutch, German and French soldiers who fought for William of Orange was a terrible hatred of Roman Catholicism which had done so much to reinforce the oppression of Spanish and French armies during and after the Thirty Years' War. Many of them settled in Ireland and it was not to be expected that the descendants of these people, men like Jacques Labadie who was acting as chaplain to Marshal Schomberg when the old Huguenot general died at the Boyne, would show understanding or toleration of Roman Catholicism. Labadie himself became Dean of Killaloe, and wherever a Labadie, a Crommelin, a Dubourdieu, a La Touche, a Barré, a Lefanu, a Lefroy or a Maturin served the Protestant establishment of church or state in Ireland his religious and political views were shaped by the stories of Huguenot persecution upon which he had been nurtured as a child. Descendants of the powerful seventeenth century

Huguenot preacher, Jacques Saurin, included James Saurin, Bishop of Dromore from 1819-1842, and William Saurin, Attorney General for Ireland from 1807-1822. These bigoted men represented only a minority in Irish Protestantism, but they influenced others when they served the Church of Ireland in Dublin, Cork, Waterford, Carlow, Kilkenny, Portarlington and Lisburn. The Irish Huguenots were as important ideologically in Protestantism as they were socially when they produced the first literary journal in the land, or economically when they encouraged silk and linen manufacturing.[8]

Although the remnant of Huguenots who remained behind in France continued to suffer persecution in the eighteenth century, the advocacy of religious toleration by Voltaire and the other philosophers of the Enlightenment had considerable influence throughout Europe, and even in Ireland. The effect of this religious latitudinarianism was considerable. The Irish Roman Catholics remained loyal during the Jacobite rising of 1745, and after the death of the Old Pretender the political and religious animosities of the preceding century seemed to be disappearing. Even among the Palatines, who had suffered so much at the hands of the Catholics, indifferentism grew in their settlements around Limerick. Assimilation into the local population increased, and only the Palatine responsiveness to the preaching of the first Wesleyan missionaries, which reinforced their earlier Calvinist faith, held up this social process.[9] Bigotry also began to wane among the Roman Catholics when it was clear that in religious affairs, at least, no more than lip service was paid to the Penal Laws. By the end of the century, as democratic and liberal ideas were brought in from America and France, it seemed as if the concept of religious toleration characteristic of the Age of Reason was about to put an end to the traditional and bitter political and religious struggle between Ireland's Catholics and Protestants. Even in Protestant Ulster influential voices were raised among churchmen to advocate full Roman Catholic emancipation. No one objected to Catholic clergy marching in siege of Derry anniversary processions, nor to their joining in thanksgiving for the blessings of the Protestant constitution which had delivered them from tyranny.[10]

This is not to imply that toleration of Roman Catholicism, or sympathy for the plight of the majority people was anything more than an indication that ideological latitudinarianism had at least some influence among Irish Protestants. Though the Presbyterians during the eighteenth century continually resented the prerogatives of the Church of Ireland, its leaders were loathe to press their differences far enough for a real division to take place among Protestants. They were never happy about the policy of preaching in Irish promoted by Narcissus Marsh, or Benjamin Pratt, Provost of Trinity College and then Dean of Down. Not only was it "a means to convert the natives and bring them over to the Established Church"[11], but it implied a lessening of the traditional 'apartheid' between the Catholic and Protestant peoples. As Rev. John Abernethy, Minister of Antrim warned the bishops, Presbyterians and Anglicans had to avoid

anything contentious which would "weaken the Protestant interest in a country where the Papists are vastly superior in strength and numbers to Protestants of all persuasions".[12]

Liberal Protestants could indicate that Roman Catholicism was no more than a medieval expression of the faith that had no authority in the age of Reason, popish doctrines were silly and erroneous, and nothing was to be feared from the papacy politically. Yet whenever talk of toleration was pushed too far in Ireland the parliament echoed with "mighty noise" about the threat to the Williamite settlement posed by "tories and rapparees".[13] Commissioner John Beresford reminded Isaac Barré in 1782 that Ireland "with a majority of popish inhabitants" lay near several popish countries, and the Protestants could never relax their anxious vigilance when Irish Roman Catholics might once more become insurgent.[14] Enlightened landlords, even in Ulster, on occasion helped with the building of chapels and schools for the majority people but by the end of the eighteenth century, even before news of the atrocities in Wexford in '98, it was clear that only a minority of Protestants were willing to share their political and ecclesiastical blessings with the Roman Catholics.[15]

Catholic Emancipation was one significant sign of the spirit of reform which influenced Westminster legislation, and during the early years of the nineteenth century the Irish Protestants became aware of how little protection was really offered to them by the Act of Union. By the time of the tithe war in the 1830's they had begun to consider themselves a people under siege. The government seemed unable to contain violence in the countryside, while at the same time it was willing to grant ever more concessions to Daniel O'Connell and his followers, like the Church Temporalities Act of 1833 which began the dismemberment of the Established Church. Their anxiety increased even more during the Repeal Years when O'Connell's policy of threatening violence in the age of his monster meetings won more and more concessions from the government in London.

During the mid-century years, especially the decade immediately following the Famine, English Evangelicalism provided largely unasked for ideological and financial reinforcement of a new policy of proselytizing among the Roman Catholics.[16] Few Protestants any longer shared in the old belief that the Church of Ireland could have a civilizing role in Irish society as a whole, however, and no one was greatly surprised when the census of 1861 indicated that there had been no dramatic increase in the number of Protestants in either the Established Church or in Nonconformity. The Protestants in both church and state knew well that Irish Roman Catholicism, inspired by the Ultramontanist spirit brought to Ireland by Paul Cullen, who became Ireland's first cardinal, was winning the cultural battle between the two political/religious traditions. Supported indirectly by reformers in the British government, especially representatives of English Nonconformity at the time of Disestablishment, Cullen was to keep up the pressure initiated by O'Connell earlier in the century. Slowly

the social and cultural positions of the two peoples began to change. Gone now was the old confidence that the superior culture of the Protestants could absorb the masses set free from "Romish corruptions" and the "errors of popery".[17] Cullen's great victory was the disestablishment and disendowment of the Church of Ireland, and a dramatic retreat by Irish Protestants from public life which was now left to the nurturing authority of resurgent Roman Catholicism.

After 1870 the withdrawal of Irish Protestantism into a religious and cultural ghetto was general, except in Ulster where the majority of the people in the north-east counties supported reformed churches. It still contributed creative leadership through individuals who chose to transcend the values of the Protestant political/religious tradition, yet by the end of the century a movement like Home Rule had become anathema to most Protestants who, in the words of Douglas Hyde were "ceasing to be Irish without becoming English".[18] At the same time as they carried out this cultural withdrawal their religious formularies, even in the Church of Ireland, increasingly promoted ideas redolent of the seventeenth rather than the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. The new constitution of the post-Disestablishment voluntary Church of Ireland, for example, stated:

> *The Church of Ireland as a reformed and Protestant church doth hereby re-affirm its constant witness against all those innovations in doctrine and worship whereby the Primitive faith hath been from time to time defaded or overlaid, and which at the Reformation this church did disown and reject.*[19]

In the last decades of the nineteenth century most Protestants were united, in varying degrees, to a defence of what was left of their increasingly threatened ascendancy culture.

Henry Cooke had prepared Irish Nonconformity to welcome the adherents of the Church of Ireland into a Protestant political and religious alliance, based on the strong reformed church culture found in Ulster, and in the post-Disestablishment era more and more Protestant energy was dissipated in strident condemnation of politically resurgent Roman Catholicism. It was, Protestants believed, directed by the priests who were intent upon seeking a new Gaelic and Vatican controlled ascendancy in the land. The free church of Ireland produced brilliant minds during the post-Disestablishment period of Protestant reorganization, but a disproportionate amount of their time and energy was spent decrying the external evil of the Roman Church and its intentions in Ireland. George Salmon, the talented Provost of Trinity College, produced in 1888 his best known work, *Infallibility of the Church*, which was a defence of Protestant principles against Roman Catholic triumphalist claims. John Henry Bernard who guided the Church of Ireland as both Archbishop of Dublin and Provost of Trinity College during the difficult years when the new state was being created in the south also wasted much of his creative energies on sterile ecclesiastical apologetic. The very gifted Archbishop of Dublin, J. A. F. Gregg, continued this passionate interest in defending the spiritual

prerogatives of the Church of Ireland, endeavouring to assert its authority in terms that belonged to an age that was long past. Little concern was shown for affairs outside of Ireland, apart from a promotion of reformed churches in Iberia, and even the theology of the Irish Protestants was presented in very traditional terms. It is interesting to note that when a centenary volume praising Church of Ireland achievements since Disestablishment was published recently by a group of Irish ecumenists none of the essays was concerned with the theological thought of the last hundred years.[20]

This inward-looking tendency was also found in Irish Nonconformity,[21] especially the Presbyterians whose territorial base in north-east Ulster was so close to Calvinist Scotland from which their anscestors had first come. Scotland in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was filled with theological controversy and Scottish Presbyterian disputes only too often were imported into Ireland. There the various groups of Presbyterians spent an inordinate amount of time and energy "maintaining their distinctness from one another and from everybody else".[22] Apart from such theological party in-fighting, the chief connection the Presbyterians seemed to have with other Protestant bodies outside Ireland was their enthusiasm to welcome the kind of religious revivalism which appeared in Ulster in 1859. This was a phenomenon which appeared simultaneously among reformed churchmen as widely disparate as Protestants in North America and Hutterites in the Ukraine. This revivalism when it manifested itself in Ireland was welcomed as a sign of spiritual renewal in a community which was increasingly defensive as the power of Roman Catholicism continued to grow. Ireland, for example, excitedly welcomed evangelical preachers like Dwight Moody and Ira Sankey in 1870, at a time when Cardinal Cullen, in an outburst of triumphalism following Disestablishment was holding "a *Te Deum* for the downfall of the old church of Elizabeth".[23]

On one level, because of their Ulster territorial land-base, the Presbyterians were less anxious about the coming Roman Catholic ascendancy than were their southern counterparts who felt culturally and religiously besieged by the indifferent or resentful majority people in southern Ireland. After all they had chased Daniel O'Connell out of the north and kept out agitators like Jack Lawless, the political/religious conservatism of Henry Cooke had overcome the liberalism of Henry Montgomery and his followers, and there was almost no Ulster enthusiasm for Home Rule. The kind of intransigence associated with the Orange Order came to its height in the years immediately before World War 1, and cries of 'No Surrender' and 'Not an inch' seemed equally applicable to ideas of political as they were to issues of religious principle.

The result of the Pan-Protestant anti-Roman Catholic political/religious alliance in Ulster after partition was the growth of a kind of cultural 'apartheid' which became a way of life. Protestants bred separately from their Catholic neighbours, worked separately, and developed a culture filled

with religious symbolism which expressed a very particular interpretation of their historical development. On every level they competed with their ever-increasing non-Protestant neighbours, and argued that if they did not maintain their cultural ascendancy then Ulster Protestants would suffer the fate of their southern counterparts who were being assimilated into the Roman Catholic society in the Republic at the rate of about 25% a generation.[24] By the middle decades of the twentieth century less and less time was being spent on theological disputation, comparatively little interest was shown in the growth of a social gospel which was so important to churchmen outside Ireland, ecumenism was largely ignored, and more and more Protestant energy was poured into supporting the survival of a culture which seemed particularly enamoured of the religious outlook of past generations.

Unfortunately for Irish Protestantism, churchmen outside Ireland, especially in the present day, have been prone to ignore the exemplary witness to Christian life presented by most of its people. Both within Ireland, in the midst of terrible violent provocation, and without, in terms of missionary witness by medical doctors, teachers and others, the Irish Protestant contribution to the spiritual work of the universal church has been magnificent. This has been overlooked only too often however as the horror of the religious and political struggle in Ulster continues and some Protestant political leaders have been presented to the outside world by the media as demagogues whose reactions seem characteristic of the seventeenth rather than the twentieth century. The threat of southern Irish Catholic and cultural imperialism, which is so real to the northern Protestants is not appreciated, nor is their patient bearing of terrible affliction at the hands of terrorists. Irish Protestants are commonly dismissed as a tenaciously conservative people, living in a religious and cultural ghetto of their own making, and delighting in the sectarian strife of other ages. The themes displayed by their banners during the marching season, and the militant hectoring presentation of their case made by some of their spokesmen contribute to the impression that they are a people willing to resort to every secular weapon in their struggle to give substance to the cry 'what we have we hold'. At worst, the world's press presents them as an arrogant ascendancy people still trying to bully the native Irish whom their ancestors first dispossessed in the age of Europe's religious wars. When Gordon McMullen, the present day Church of Ireland Bishop of Clougher attended an international colloquium on Northern Ireland in the summer of 1982 he was greatly disturbed to find that many representatives of the Reformed and other churches at the conference viewed Irish Protestants as unreasonable, intolerant and aggressive to a marked degree, as they perpetuated civil and religious oppression in Ulster.[25]

However misguided may be this outside opinion on the part of people who know nothing of Irish history and are apt to dismiss Irish Protestants as misguided bigots, it needs to be reckoned with, and a way forward found to present a truer picture of the religious life of Ireland's reformed

churchmen. We must now consider how, in terms of Protestant thought, they have arrived at this point in history, and how their churches may out of their historical experience make a spiritual contribution of hope that is so needed in our fear-ridden and despairing world.

The Shaping

The immediate reaction of Irish Protestants to outside criticism of their expression of the Christian faith is usually a shrug of the shoulders, and a reply which indicates their belief that few people understand the unrelenting nature of the attack made upon them by Roman Catholic cultural imperialists and their nationalist allies. It has existed since the seventeenth century and Irish Protestants have no intention of giving up what to them is a justified struggle for liberty of religious and cultural expression. As for the charge that at least the political aspect of their intransigent expression of Protestantism is not even Christian they are apt to appeal to what Paul Tillich has called "the Protestant principle"; a protest against any human judgment which seeks to limit, circumscribe, or even define the will of God for others.[26]

Yet behind this xenophobic rejection of criticism from other churchmen is a deep quiet anxiety among many Irish Protestants for they know now that they seem particularly outside the mainstream of Christian development. Their religious life and culture is judged as insular, peculiarly introverted, and is misunderstood by most other churchmen. They are concerned that if there is even partial truth in what is said by their critics then their political/religious ideology may truly be a distortion of the faith of their fathers. It is this lingering doubt that is encouraging an identity crisis in Irish Protestantism.

Obsessive concern with religious, ecclesiastical, and cultural survival by groups of Christians is nothing new in the history of the church. Some of the Old Testament prophets had protested against Israel's tendency to view God as a tribal deity, and one of the strengths of the early church was its universalism which rejected old ideas of Jewish particularism. When particularism arose in the church among people like the Donatists, St. Augustine and others protested the attempt by these rigorist Christians to withdraw from the mainstream of development of the church, and to proclaim God's peculiar interest only in their religious and cultural expression of the faith.

This is not to deny any value to particularism in religious expression, for surely the assertion of a singular interpretation of the faith lies at the very heart of Protestantism. The spiritual vitality of the parts of the church must be encouraged,as much as the well-being of the whole. Yet there is always the danger, as the history of the church reveals, that a particular religious expression can evolve into a form which is so far removed from the mainstream of development that it distorts the essence of the faith which first encouraged it.

The seventeenth century which has been so important in the shaping of Irish Protestantism also encouraged idealistic Calvinists to leave the Low Counties, France and Germany to found their version of the Kingdom of God upon earth in distant South Africa. When they settled in South Africa these Afrikaner people believed themselves to be in particular covenant with God. Their descendants made their Great Trek into the wilderness to ensure their religious and cultural survival believing that the Providence of God was peculiarly with them, even as it was when they won their great victory over the Zulus at Blood River in 1838. Similarly, when John Winthrop and his English followers sailed to Massachusetts on the *Arbella* in 1630 they were convinced their 'Errand Into the Wilderness' was at God's command. They were particularly in covenant with the deity and in a remarkable sermon on board the ship Winthrop told them they must not fail in their attempt to build a visibly Christian settlement in the New World, or they would become: "a story and a by-word through the world, wee shall open the mouthes of enemies to speak evill of the wayes of God and all professours for God's sake".[27]

The church universal, however, has not been uncritical of what these zealous Protestant people encouraged in their particular expressions of the Christian faith. They had peculiar ideas of justice and mercy, like most seventeenth century Christians, and they never doubted that the Providence of God was for the Afrikaner rather than the Zulu, or the Puritan rather than the Indian—just as their Calvinist cousins in Ireland had no doubt God was with the Protestant planter rather than the papist Irishman he dispossessed.

Whatever the temptation to interpret the Providence of God in tribal deity terms most Christians accept that scripture, on the whole, does not allow such an accommodation. The New Testament insists that the first fruits of the coming Kingdom are not to be revealed to any one historical people. Rather the good news is to be brought to the blind, comfort to the fearful, and challenge to the rich. There seems to be in the New Testament a bias towards those who lose out in history, and Jesus had much to say about God's Providence for the poor, the meek, the mourners, the merciful, the peacemakers, the persecuted, and those who long for righteousness in an unjust world.

St. Augustine in his *De Civitate Dei* understood this universal view of God's Providence which was accepted by the faithful, those who sojourned in this world yet were citizens of the Heavenly City. Resident aliens in time and space, set apart from their fellow men by their 'holy yearning', they live in hope, fighting despair as they try to exercise the whole range of loves of which men are capable in their period of history. They do not seek to create any utopia or purely earthly fulfillment in history, nor to reverence any human cause or worldly culture. They serve a higher loyalty, the Providence of God, and they accept that as they live in the City of God they will have continuing conflict with those who manage the affairs of this world. Their trials will continue until the return of Christ whose judgment

will bring to an end the mingling of the citizens of the City of God and the City of Man in history. Until then the Christian lives proleptically in the Kingdom in history "happy in the present time by hope".[28]

This idea of the universal Providence of God has not been understood, nor easily accepted by many religious people. They have tended to identify the Providence of God with the needs of the particular people to whom they belong, and to invoke the blessing of the deity upon whatever earthly Zion they themselves have created in history. In fervent piety they have praised the Almighty who is redeeming the world through the agency of their political, religious, ecclesiastical or cultural creation. They have also joined in their criticism of metaphysical thought, such as that of St. Augustine, offered by secular thinkers since the time of Voltaire and the Marquis de Condorcet. Eschatological ideas of God's Providence being with all men in their pilgrim history have been replaced by faith in the perfectibility and progress of men—usually of one tribe or folk, at the expense of others.

In our own age, however, we are being compelled to consider the historical fate of all men, as more and more thinkers consider the progress of mankind in apocalyptic or eschatological terms. They share the pessimism of the great prophet of Nihilism, Friederich Nietzsche, who proclaimed a hundred years ago that there was little to be hoped for, even from the churches:

> *The waters of religion retreat and leave behind pools and bogs. Never was the world worldlier, never was it emptier of love and goodness . . . everything prepares us for the coming barbarism.*[29]

Professional historians, political scientists, economists, sociologists and others looking at the world see a nuclear arms race by the superpowers, an ever increasing world population, diminishing natural resources, and no human agency able to control an economic order which is encouraging a desperate struggle for survival among peoples. Everywhere men's hearts are failing them for fear.

Yet hope is now being expressed once more by some churchmen who again are proclaiming that the God of the Bible is very much the God of history. American Catholic bishops, presenting the church as a Christian community of moral discourse, concerned with the affairs of all men, have joined in a growing Christian protest over the drift to nuclear war.[30] The New Year's message of the Canadian Catholic bishops in 1983 has criticized the economic policies of their civil government which does not recognize that: "the cries of the poor and powerless are the voice of Christ, the Lord of History in our midst".[31] In South Africa dissident white Afrikaner churchmen have protested the too close identification of the White Dutch Reformed Church with nationalist culture, and have called for repentance which will lead the church to show forth the Kingdom of God to all men in history: "The church has a wonderful opportunity to be God's experimental garden in the world."[32] The true mission of the church is to proclaim in history, to 'make manifest' in time, the Kingdom of God which is coming into being in the midst of a world filled with despair.[33]

At a time when the threat of 'omnicide' is very real there is less interest now being shown in the anti-historical theologies of thinkers like Karl Barth who were criticized for not taking seriously the implications of the Incarnation.[34] Once more the churches are talking about the Providence of God, the assurance that men in despair hunger for; the conviction that with them in history is "some eternal greatness incarnate in the passage of temporal fact".[35] They can only hope to advance into an open-ended future where there will be creativity and not destruction, love and not hate, when they know that God is with them: "the great companion—the fellow sufferer who understands".[36] The task of the church is neither to lose its soul by merging its cause with some secular ideology, nor to encourage the faithful to look out from this world in pseudo-piety. The church is to give man hope by showing forth for all men the first fruits of the coming Kingdom.

This eschatological presentation of the Gospel is a far more sophisticated theology than the nineteenth century European faith in the Providence of God which was so easily accepted by some intellectuals. The historian Leopold Von Ranke was so sure of the role of the deity in history that he could say: "in all history God dwells, lives, is to be seen. Every deed demonstrates Him, every moment preaches his name".[37] After Auschwitz, Hiroshima, or the continuing agony in Ulster, however, this sanguine belief is difficult to accept. On the other hand modern man can relate to the idea of what Herbert Butterfield called "the subtle in history".[38] When there are too many human inner contradictions in history Providence will intervene; regardless of the nature of tragic human conflict, or catclysm which drives men to despair, a new creative complexity can emerge other than what men had expected. Good will can be brought out of evil, reconciliation out of tragic hatred, deliverance out of hopelessness. People who think in these terms are, on the one hand, reverently agnostic about the capacities of the human mind to encompass all factors, command all complexities, manage all human miscalculations, cope with the unforeseen, or handle uncontrollable change. On the other hand they have faith that God's Providence is operative in the historical process, that there is:

> *. . . that kind of history making which goes on, so to speak, over our heads, now deflecting the results of our actions, now taking our purposes out of our hands, and now turning our endeavours to ends not yet realized.*[39]

The history of the church is full of examples where what Christians would call the Providence of God has persuaded men to rediscover hope in the midst of despair, to become in their generation part of "a many-sided effort to answer certain existential predicaments which confront every human being".[40] During the ferocious European religious wars of the seventeenth century 30,000 out of 35,000 villages in Bohemia were destroyed, the population of Wurtemberg was reduced from 400,000 to 48,000 and even the zealots of the age were silent before the sheer savagery of Johann Tilly's sacking of Magdeburg in 1631. By the last years of the

Thirty Years' War marching and counter-marching Catholic and Protestant armies had reduced by half the popualtion of much of Europe. It seemed beyond hope that this age of passion could ever be succeeded by one of increasing religious toleration. Yet it was. On one level historians can say this was a natural reaction, but it came about because throughout Europe 'like a seed growing secretly' ordinary men and women who otherwise were historically unimportant began to respond to some inner 'subtle influence' and to practice religious toleration. *Sub specie aeternitatis* these unknown saints were much more important in history than the princes and prelates who were swept up in the savagery of the age. The age of religious wars passed only when more and more people began to live proleptically in the state of peace which in their hearts they knew was coming. They began to view history as a process where Providence would encounter human aberration and overcome man's disorder.

Ireland's tragedy was that because of its insularity, and its prolonged time of religious warfare, it was not easy for people to respond to ideas of religious toleration which appeared in so many parts of the continent and in England in the eighteenth century. Recognition that deliverance from bigotry was possible by a response to the 'subtle in history' was not easily accepted by a conservative people who refused to believe that the Providence of God was concerned for the development of all men, not just those who belonged to a particular political/religious culture. People in Ireland were simply unable to shake off the atavistic religious passions of the seventeenth century which still had the power of resurrecting suspicion and hatred when any time of crisis brought Catholics and Protestants into confrontation. To the wonder of so many Christians outside Ireland this state of political/religious bondage is still found among some Catholics and Protestants alike, effectively denying them hope of spiritual evolution.

The Way Forward

As Irish Protestants increasingly find themselves isolated from the concerns of the rest of the Christian church, they find it difficult to apologize for what is dismissed as a fossilized version of the faith by impatient critics who know little of their history—even during the last fourteen years of siege. Some culturally xenophobic members of their churches can reject such judgments as based solely on ignorance, but other Irish Protestants are going through thoughtful re-appraisal as they question the value of some of their seventeenth century attitudes. The basis of their political and cultural power is steadily being eroded, and this, coupled with unease about how their religious outlook can be justified, has brought upon them a major questioning of much of their religious life.

I would suggest that a new identity can be found by Irish Protestants through recognition that the Providence of God can once more give them hope of moving out of their religious and cultural isolation, to become a seminal element in the mainstream of Christian development—the

movement towards the coming Kingdom. To accomplish this they need theological persuasion, however, and perhaps that can be provided through a renewed interest in a neglected teaching of the great father of the Reformation whose concepts have been so important in the shaping of Irish Protestant thought. This is John Calvin, parts of whose theology have been used in seventeenth century fashion to justify Irish Protestant isolationism and sectarianism. Often Calvin's thought has been interpreted solely in terms of the particularist ideas found in the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* which were written when he was still a young man. A fuller insight into his mature thought is provided in his later biblical commentaries, however, as these were composed during the years of struggle he spent in Geneva trying to establish what was to him a godly order, for the ultimate benefit of all men. It is in these writings that Calvin had much to say about the Providence of God, historical development and eschatological hope.

Luther had recognized God as Lord of History, but had insisted that the deity was concealed behind his "play", his "mummery", his "joust and tourney", and man had a hard time to recognize his Providence. Calvin on the other hand stressed the role of God's Providence in man's history. Even in the *Institutes* he stressed that God was not "the empty, idle" God of the medieval scholastics, one who "reposes idly as in a watchtower". Rather he was "watchful, effective, active" and engaged in "ceaseless activity". He regulated everything on earth by his Providence, and "nothing takes place without His deliberation". His power was "constantly exerted on every distinct and particular movement".[41] Just as the ancient Hebrews and other people of God had been delivered in times past so God was now with the faithful as they sought to serve Him in their history. It was this conviction of the abiding Providence of God with them that enabled the sturdy Calvinist frontiersmen of the seventeenth century in South Africa, America or Ireland to persevere in their attempts to build godly 'plantations' which would influence the very direction of historical development.[42]

In a well-known letter to Cardinal Sadoleto in 1539 Calvin specifically dismissed the erroneous interpretation which was to become so prevalent—the idea that Christian life was to be concerned only with individual salvation. God was not only with his people, said Calvin, but he wished to use them to build his Kingdom here on earth. They were not to be caught up in the worldly affairs of men, but rather they were to have 'contempt' for the values of this world. This 'contempt' was not of value in itself, as the teaching of Thomas à Kempis or other medieval pietists had suggested, but it was to be a discipline, a means of living in the Kingdom now, to show forth in history what was coming. They were to live on the spiritual frontiers of man's religious and cultural development, until the end of history and the return of Christ. Calvin bluntly told Sadoleto that the Christian must "ascend higher than merely to seek and secure the salvation of his own soul".[43] In the words of a contemporary writer, Calvin wished his followers to adopt:

. . . a dynamic approach which sees the Church waging war to transform the realm of historical existence more into the likeness of the Father's will in Christ; God is building his Kingdom in this world and through the history of this world.[44]

R. H. Tawney believed that it was this religious ideology which made the Calvinists as much a revolutionary force in earlier times as Marxists have been in the twentieth century.[45] Theirs was, in the words of Ernst Troeltsch, an "heroic faith",[46] as they overcame evil in this world, and promoted the coming of the Kingdom of God upon earth—the Kingdom that was coming for all men. In Calvin's own words:

We now begin to be reformed in the image of God by his spirit so that the complete renewal of ourselves and the whole world may follow in its own time.[47]

In Marxist terminology Calvin calls the faithful to the exercise of Christian praxis. They are to live lives of sacrificial love in history refusing to accept as ultimate the authorities and values of the culture in which they pass their earthly sojourn. Their spiritual struggle to overcome in this world is part of a cosmic process:

The conflict of God's Kingdom and the struggle with daemonic powers which occurs within the dimensions of the theatre of history is mirrored in the spiritual experience of every single Christian.[48]

The 'heroism' of the early Calvinists reflected their acceptance that they would always be in a state of tension with the world around them, an inevitable consequence of not coming to terms with the political, religious or cultural values of the society in which they lived.[49] This tension almost invariably brought upon them suffering, the bearing of the Cross, and this they accepted as the cost of naming the Kingdom in history. There was no way to hurry the return of Christ, so this process of living in a state of tension in the world would be theirs until the parousia. Nor were they to try to redeem the world by some theocratic exercise, for only God could do this. The early Calvinists would have understood what Dietrich Bonhoeffer later referred to when he reminded his contemporaries in the World War II era, that they were not "lords but instruments in the hand of the Lord of history".[50] As they bore the cross the faithful were to be sustained only by their eschatological hope which was to strengthen them in the midst of despair. They took for granted that the more they advanced the coming of the Kingdom through the exercise of sacrificial love the harder would the attacks of their enemies increase, nor would they cease until the end of time.[51] Time and again Calvin told his followers that it would not be easy to lead "a heavenly life in the world".[52]

This was how the early Protestants in Ireland, who were all some kind of Calvinist, looked upon their hard frontier life where they were always under potential attack by their Roman Catholic neighbours. They were a people at war, their political/religious settlements centres of civilization as well as communities where the reformed faith could be preached. Their mission, in the words of Calvin, was to "reduce the whole world to his order,

and subject it to his government",[53] and they looked upon their churches and communities as places where the overcoming of this world had begun, where the Kingdom was being shown forth. Though they had ecclesiastical tensions, members of the Church of Ireland and the Nonconformists were united in common resolve to overcome the spiritual evil of Roman Catholicism and the barbarity of the majority people. They expected no peace when they had to contend in the words of Robert Blair, minister of Bangor between 1623 and 1634, with a people "not only obdured in Popish superstition and idolatry, but also in their idleness and incivility".[54]

One aspect of Reformation theology which had particular appeal to the hard-pressed Protestants of seventeenth century Ireland was the concept of the Antichrist, mentioned in the Johannine epistles. Sometimes the Antichrist was identified with the 'man of sin' referred to in 2 Thessalonians, who was to appear during a time of great apostasy before the promised 'day of the Lord', Luther, as might be expected, identified the pope as "the right Antichrist" as did other reformers like William Tyndale. Calvin usually chose to describe the papacy as this evil agent, and thus it is described in the marginal notes of the Geneva Bible.[55] In the *Institutes*, however, Calvin castigates the pope as the Antichrist:

> . . . [*Paul*] *designates Antichrist by this mark, that he will deprive God of his honour in order to take it upon himself . . . Since therefore, it is clear that the Roman Pontiff has shamelessly transferred to himself what belonged to God alone and especially to Christ, we should have no doubt that he is the leader and standard-bearer of that impious and hateful kingdom.*[56]

In Calvin's theology the Reformation was an eschatological event, part of the great struggle against the power of Antichrist in history as the saints strove to prepare on earth the beginning of the Kingdom.[57] The battle of Armageddon referred to in the book of Revelation was now taking place in history, each victory over the Antichrist bringing the Kingdom that much closer, but "the more pressingly God offers Himself to the world in the Gospel, and invites men into His Kingdom, the more boldly will wicked men belch forth the poison of their impiety".[58] This viewpoint was easily understood by the Scots settlers in Ulster, who knew that John Knox had identified the Antichrist with the pope in his *Second Book of Discipline* of 1578, and could easily identify him as the leader of the barbarous people who refused to allow them to occupy the land in peace. This thinking was also prevalent among strong Calvinists in the Church of Ireland such as Walter Travers, the first Provost of Trinity College, Dublin, Adam Loftus, the Archbishop of Dublin, or James Ussher, the scholarly Archbishop of Armagh. The latter compiled the Calvinist inspired *Articles of Religion* adopted by the Irish church in its first convocation of 1615, and in them the pope was identified as "that man of sin",[59] The authority of this statement of reformed faith was such that these articles were the basis for the later *Westminster Confession of Faith* which has been so important in the development of Irish Presbyterianism.

History in Ireland has always been dominated by political/religious warfare, and it has not been difficult for Irish Protestants in times of peril to feel that some cosmic evil power directs the relentless attack upon them. In one form or another the identification of the pope or the papacy with the Antichrist has remained in their thinking since the seventeenth century. Whereas English Protestants by the end of that century were considering Antichrist in a more sophisticated way, as the evil latent within all men, the besieged Irish Protestants never had the feeling of security which would allow them to transcend the limitations of thought which had come out of the age of religious wars. One has only to look at the banners during Orange Order parades to see how old passions are kept alive by depiction of events like the burning of Ridley and Latimer, or the drowning of Protestants in the river Bann. They still tend to identify with John Foxe's view of the Reformation: "the brightness of God's word was set up to confound the dark and false-vizored kingdom of Antichrist".[60]

It is loyalty to this reformation age ideology which bedevils Irish Protestants so that they sometimes present to the world an expression of political/religious particularism which few people can appreciate. It effectively ensures that so long as it governs their thinking they will not be able to play their part in the universal mission of the church. They seem to show interest in only their atavistic culture on the edge of Europe, fighting an ideological battle that has little or no relevance in terms of historical development in the last years of the twentieth century. To anyone acquainted with Irish history such a fossilization of Irish Protestantism is, of course, understandable, yet at the same time it is a spiritual tragedy. Obsessed with political and religious survival Irish Protestants have, at times, turned their backs on a world filled with apocalyptic despair—at a time when they have so much to give to that world in its agony.

This spiritual 'silence' on the part of Irish Protestants, and sometimes their failure to show forth the redeeming, reconciling power of love rather than discord, is what leads the outside world to doubt them. They receive the kind of opprobrium visited upon the papacy because of its failure to make loving sacrificial witness against the evil which beset so much of Europe during the last war. One the of the critics of the papacy immediately after the war was Albert Camus who told the Dominicans of Latour-Marbourg in 1948:

> *For a long time during those frightful years I waited for a great voice to speak up in Rome. I, an unbeliever? Precisely. For I knew that the spirit would be lost if it did not utter a cry of condemnation when faced with force. It seems that that voice did speak up. But I assure you that millions of men like me did not hear it and that at that time believers and unbelievers alike shared a solitude that continued to spread as the days went by and the executioners multiplied.*
>
> *It has been explained to me since that the condemnation was indeed voiced. But that it was in the style of the encyclicals which*

is not at all clear. The condemnation was voiced, and it was not understood. Who could fail to feel where the true condemnation lies in this case, and to see that this example by itself gives part of the reply, perhaps the whole reply that you ask of me. What the world expects of Christians is that Christians should speak up loud and clear, and that they should voice their condemnation in such a way that never a doubt, never the slightest doubt could rise in the heart of the simplest man. That they should get away from abstractions, and confront the bloodstained face history has taken in our day.[61]

How loudly and clearly have Irish Protestants spiritually transcended their symbiotic relationship with their culture, and "confronted the bloodstained face history has taken in our day"? In an age when the march of the executioners, and the growth of urban terrorism threatens civilisation, what examples of heroic love in the face of terrible adversity have Irish Protestants presented to the world—showing forth the redemptive, reconciling power of the Kingdom? Darkly has been one such epiphany, but at other times the Protestants of Ireland have been seen as a people enthralled by the passions of by-gone ages—as the Bishop of Clogher, and so many others have discovered.

What is particularly sad is that the Irish Protestants sometimes deny much of the best in the theological thought of the Reformation era they revere. John Calvin continuously had to battle depression of the spirit as he struggled to bring godly order to Geneva, and he told Johann Bullinger, the chief pastor of Zurich, how often he had wanted to retire from the conflict. Yet his eschatological vision of Geneva showing forth the Kingdom in history would not allow him to rest: "When I consider how important this corner of the world is for the spread of God's Kingdom I have reason to be concerned about protecting it".[62] This eschatological hope also influenced some of his followers. When John Winthrop preached his famous sermon, 'A Modell of Christian Charity' to the saints on board the *Arbella* in 1630 he told them how important in terms of showing forth the Kingdom was to be their settlement at Salem: "we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill, the eies of all people are upon us".[63] Though the particular expressions of Christianity advocated by either Calvin or the American Puritans may not be completely appreciated in our age, the universalism in their thought is something we need to rediscover—the eschatological concept that over and against the values of a cruel and despairing world, a revelation of the coming Kingdom can be offered for the blessing of all men.

Perhaps if Irish Protestantism could transcend the spiritually inhibiting particularism of religious expression which its history has sometimes nurtured, it can give forth to the world hope that 'the march of the executioners' can be overcome. If its people show forth to the despairing world by their love the coming of the Kingdom, then their land too could be 'a city upon a hill' for the benefit of all men. Thomas Munzer in his Prague

Manifesto during the Reformation wars spoke of the "bitter" as well as the "sweet" Christ, the Christ with man as he bore the cross, as well as Christ with man in times of peace.[64] No one would deny that Irish Protestants have known the 'bitter' Christ—now an anxious world waits for them in the midst of their agony to show forth a proleptic revelation of God's Shalom.

To write in this fashion is not just an exercise in religious rhetoric. It is often only in the face of such prolonged evil as that visited upon Irish Protestants that a genuine Christian voice of protesting love can be raised, however uncertain or even timid it may sound beside the loud assertions of the executioners of our day. After the fall of the Nazis one of the leading members of the party explained to his captors what finally defeated them:

> *The enemy we could not buy or break was the aristocratic individualism of the ordinary citizen of the West. If only we had hanged—as Himmler was always itching to do—all those outdated legalists with their squawks about moral dignity—then our movement would have swept the world.*[65]

In the same way it is possible for Irish Protestants, in spite of how they have been shaped by centuries of political/religious warfare, to resist sacralizing their tribal history and to continue to 'squawk loudly' about matters like 'moral dignity' and the coming of the Kingdom. They can spiritually transcend what Gladstone once described to Queen Victoria as "the perverseness of centuries" in Ireland.[66] They can show forth restraint in the midst of terrible provocation, reason in the midst of passion, love in the midst of hate, hope in the midst of depair. In a world which is everywhere threatened by the dreadful power of mindless terrorism, and thinks more and more in apocalyptic terms, the kind of witness made by Irish Protestants after the Darkly atrocity can give great hope. If through Grace and through their bearing of the Cross in their present trial the Protestants of Ireland are able to transcend the determining forces of their history, and help build a new civilization of love in Ireland, then the Kingdom will be brought that much closer for all men. They will look to Ireland and see in the new creation which its Protestants, and others, have created, a hope-giving 'City upon a Hill'.

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Eschatology in 1 Thessalonians

by HARRY UPRICHARD

Eschatology or "the doctrine of last things", in the limited aspect of teaching regarding the Parousia or Second Coming of our Lord, occurs in 1 Thessalonians both in isolated verses viz., 1:10; 2:19; 3:13, 5:23 and in two connected passages, viz., 4:13-18 and 5:1-11. A consideration of these suggests the following teaching concerning the Lord's Return.

First of all it implies vindication in respect of the glorified Christian. The Thessalonians await the return of God's son from heaven, who delivers them from the wrath to come (1:10). They will be Paul's joy and crown at the Parousia (2:19). Paul prays that the Lord will present them in impeccable holiness before God on that occasion (3:13), and his concluding request of God for them in his letter is that they may in their entirety, spirit, soul and body, be preserved well and without reproach at that day (5:23).

All of this suggests that the Parousia will be for the believer an occasion of vindication. Not only will he escape the wrath of God on that day, but he will be presented in holiness before his Creator at Christ's Return. What a great encouragement to those involved in Christian work to have this public recognition and divine seal upon their labour! The constant praying and patient caring for those brought with great difficulty to faith in Christ will be so signally rewarded as the prospect of their glorified state rejoices their teacher's heart on that day. The faithful sowing and meticulous training will be so graciously owned of God in their experience at that time. What glorious prospect is here for each believer as he anticipates his place within a Church presented before Christ and the Father in spotless splendour!

Then, too, it implies comfort in respect of the dead Christian. This is the prime thrust of Paul's teaching on the Second Coming in the passage 1 Thess. 4:13-18. He writes specifically to comfort those who sorrow over Christian loved ones who have died before the Parousia. The strength of this comfort, which he enjoins as mutual exhortation (v.18), rests principally on two grounds.

The death and resurrection of Christ (v.14) is one of these. The form in which Paul presents this truth underlines its historicity. It is on the grounds of the historical facts of Christ's death and resurrection that comfort and assurance are offered to Christians concerning their Christian loved ones who have died in the Lord. These kernal historic facts of the gospel are the basis of the believer's solace regarding his believing friends at time of bereavement. What greater foundation of comfort, what stronger encouragement of hope can he have than these?

The Parousia of the Lord Jesus Christ (vv.15-17) is the second ground to which Paul directs the Thessalonians in comforting themselves

concerning departed Christian friends. Again, the form in which this truth is presented emphasizes its authority. It is given to them from Paul "by [literally] in word of Lord." Much discussion has ranged over the particular origin of this word of the Lord, the substance of which is in vv. 15-17. Whatever the precise nature of the origin of the revelation, it is its authority which is stressed. This information which Paul offers the Thessalonians for their comfort, comes with all the imperium of a sovereign word from the sovereign Lord to their hearts.

Not only the form of the word but the details of it further substantiate its authority. The descent at the Parousia will be of the Lord in person. The cry of command, the archangel's call and the trumpet of God all stress the majestic arrival of a king. The rising of the dead "first" and the emphatic "together with them" almost "simultaneously with them"[1] describing the movement of surviving Christians together with their resurrected brothers to meet the Lord, removes any anxiety from the minds of the Thessalonians that their departed friends will be at any disadvantage at the Parousia.

This authoritative word of the Lord indicating Christ's personal intervention at the Parousia, and the simultaneous nature of the rising of Christians to meet their Lord, are the facets of Paul's teaching on the Second Coming which he urges upon believers at Thessalonica as firm grounds upon which to comfort each other. Let us continue to derive comfort and assurance from the hope and certainty of these future events and let us console those in bereavement on their express authority.

Again, it implies encouragement in respect of living Christians. Paul's exhortation to the Thessalonians to continue encouraging and up-building one another as they had been doing (5:11) arises from two main considerations of his teaching regarding our Lord's return in that chapter. The unexpected nature of the Parousia (5:13) is one. Paul stresses this aspect of the Second Coming to them as though it was teaching with which they were well acquainted and which he had perhaps given to them on his founding mission. The link of this unexpected nature of the Coming with our Lord's teaching seems clear from Mt. 24:40-44 and especially from v.43.[2] The inevitability of this occurrence and the impossibility of escape from it are stressed in the vivid imagery of child-birth (5:3). The very uncertainty of the actual time of this coming should lead them to a constant and watchful wakefulness (5:6).

The Christian's relationship to the Parousia (5:4-10) is the second. It is this aspect, on which Paul appears to dwell at even greater length in this section: their relationship to the Day of the Lord is such that it should not take them by surprise (5:4). Paul puts their relationship to that day in two different ways. God's character is imparted to them (5:5-8). They are both sons of the light and sons of the day. That is, as this Semitic form of expression would seem to indicate, they are characterized both by the enlightenment of gospel truth and by the joy, vindication and glory in prospect for them at Christ's return.[3] The darkness of sin and of ignorance no longer predominates in their nature. Therefore, not only must they be

watchful but they must put on garments appropriate to their character and must cultivate fruits which will give evidence of their new nature, namely, faith, love and hope (5:8).

Besides, God's purpose will be fulfilled in them (5:9-10). Their future is as secure as their present is dynamic by virtue of this relationship. They are destined not for wrath but for life. It is a life resulting from Christ's death for them, and a life which is assured to them regardless of their dying before or surviving to the Parousia.

Thus, moved by the uncertainty of the actual moment of Christ's return, but also stimulated by their direct relationship with that event, both in terms of their spiritual enlightenment and of the fulfillment of the divine purpose in them through it, believers are to continue the process of mutual encouragement and mutual strengthening.

They are not to absorb themselves in abstruse calculations as to the moment of our Lord's return. Rather, accepting that they are not meant to know what is not properly their business, they are to live their lives as to be ready for His return at any moment. They are to recognize their relationship to that day in terms of their own spiritual enlightenment, and to see to it, by their watchfulness and sobriety, that they are manifesting the fruit of love, hope and faith in their lives. These are suitable characteristics for those who are sons of the day. They are to look, not in wistful speculation but in glad hope and anticipation to that day as the occasion of God's completed purpose in them, a destiny of eternal life through Christ. It is thus that Zion must lengthen her cords and strengthen her stakes in prospect of her King's return.

The force of these biblical principles should not be lost on us. We must translate them into strategies for living in the modern world. When eschatology becomes abstruse and academic it loses its dynamic. The world in which these principles were given was the Judaeo-Christian of the first century. There is, however, a timeless quality about them for man is still a fallen, if redeemed, creaturely and contingent being. The hope of final vindication should continue to inspire Christians in the present modern world as they confirm personal faith, attend to its growth to maturity and see evidence of it both in their own transformed lives and in transformed relationships within their homes and in society. This is what Paul urges the Thessalonians to continue: "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing" (5:1). It was the dynamic of their faith which was spreading throughout Greece. That faith was specified as their turning from idolatry, their living service of God and their anticipation of God's Son from heaven. Modern Christians must be characterized by a continual turning from the empty vanity of the old way and by a constant service of God whom they have found through His Son to be real and effectual in daily experience. The strategy is based on the fact that they are already new creatures, "sons of the light". They should be enjoying, expanding and making fresh discoveries about this new nature relevant to their living whether in home, office, workshop, factory-floor

or school-room. This will transform relationships in all of these settings. The interruption of this life-cycle by death is as much a part of the twentieth century as of the first. The practical comfort and hope offered by this teaching must literally be used by Christians to help one another in grief. If we serve anticipating a final vindication, we must come to view death as one step nearer that vindication on our on-going march from grace to glory. Not only life but death is transformed by the gospel.

Is this, however, enough? Stated baldly the conservative stance has been to develop the renewed nature in personal surroundings through Bible instruction, prayer and fellowship with other Christians. By this means and the proclamation of Christ's Lordship they have sought to extend the parameters of the kingdom in the world. Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden have prepared a new approach, a new "kingdom theology", which they explain in their jointly written *Current Trends in Theology.*[4] Writing from a Third World background they recognize the conservative position, itemize another which they describe as redefining the mission of the church in humanisation, through development projects, trades union activity, political education and social change, and propose a third where they see the mission of the church in terms of the Kingdom of God. The expression of this kingdom must not only be in proclaiming Jesus as Lord but in seeking to transform the structures of society appropriate to establishing this kingdom as much as possible here and now.

Many of their suggestions are helpful. There is a real sense in which New Testament eschatology proposes not only a future kingdom but one which has broken in on our present age. It is true that Christian as compared with pre-Christian apocalyptic is characterized by optimism rather than pessimism and in this we have not taken Christ's victory and its implications for our life-style sufficiently seriously. It is basic to presume that we must express our sonship of light in daily living and relationships and be concerned about structures which impede this progress. The biblical emphasis, however, seems to stress constantly as a priority the personal development of faith within the context of our relationships in both church and society and to do so as a quietly transforming leaven or preserving salt rather than as an outright frontal attack. There may be those systems which are so amoral and "anti-kingdom" in their structure that we must oppose them. That is acceptable. Nevertheless, such a preoccupation can too easily lead to a dependence on this process rather than on the transforming personal agency of a maturing faith associated with the normative proclamation of Christ's Lordship.

The eschatology of 1 Thessalonians reminds us of the victory of Christ by highlighting a final vindication, practical comfort and encouragement in present service for the Christian. As a strategy it is largely directed towards motivation, for it stresses that we are sons of the light. As to practical expression, it emphasizes a continuance in and maturing of personal faith rooted in repentance and regeneration and the relevance of this Lordship of Christ in renewed human relationships: "Make it your

ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody". (1 Thess 4.II). It is a task well worthy of the attention of us all.

NOTES

1. L. Morris, *1 & 2 Epistle of Paul to Thessalonians*, (Grand Rapids, 1968), p. 145 n. 63.
2. G. H. Waterman, "The Sources of Paul's Teaching on the Second Coming of Christ in 1 and 2 Thessalonians", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Vol. 18, (1975), pp. 105-113.
3. The actual phrase "sons of the light" is found in Lk. 16:8 but the contrast between light and darkness as characteristic of Christian experience is also found in Paul at Eph. 5:6f and at Rom.13:11f, where the context is that of the Parousia. The concept is found frequently in Qumran literature as is evident from the scroll entitled "The War of the Sons of Light with the Sons of Darkness."
4. V. Samuel and C. Sugden, *Current Trends in Theology, A Third World Guide*, (Bangalore, 1981).

Os Guinness is a freelance writer, now living in Oxfordshire.

John Gillespie is Lecturer in French at the University of Ulster, Coleraine.

Ronald Wells is Professor of History at Calvin College, Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Alan Flavelle is Minister of Lowe Memorial Prebsyterian Church at Finaghy, Belfast.

Dwight W. Van Winkle is Associate Professor of Religion at Seattle-Pacific University, Washington.

Desmond Bowen is Professor of History at Carleton University, Ottawa.

Harry Uprichard is Minister of Trinity Presbyterian Church, Ahoghill, Co. Antrim.